

91/46
c

The Bancroft Library

University of California • Berkeley

REGIONAL ORAL HISTORY OFFICE

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

ON THE WATERFRONT:
AN ORAL HISTORY OF RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

Dominic Ghio with Tony Ghio

FISHERMEN BY TRADE: SIXTY YEARS ON SAN FRANCISCO BAY

An Interview Conducted by
Judith K. Dunning
in 1986



DOMINIC GHIO AND TONY GHIO

Photograph by Judith K. Dunning, 1986

This manuscript is available for research purposes. Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, 486 Library, University of California, Berkeley 94720, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Dominic Ghio with Tony Ghio, "Fishermen By Trade: Sixty Years on San Francisco Bay," an oral history conducted in 1986 by Judith K. Dunning, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1990.

Copy no. 1

Acknowledgments

The Regional Oral History Office, on behalf of future researchers, wishes to thank the following organizations whose contributions made possible this project, "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California."

The CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES, a state division of the National Endowment For The Humanities

Matching Funds

Chevron USA
Crowley Maritime Corporation
Moore Dry Dock Foundation
Mechanics Bank
Marco F. Hellman Fund
Kaiser Healthplan, Inc.
Bechtel Power Corporation
Friends of The Bancroft Library

The completion of the oral history volumes and their distribution to participating Bay Area public libraries was funded through a grant by the U.S. Department of Education under the provision of the Library Services and Construction Act administered in California by the State Librarian. The work was done in cooperation with the Richmond Public Library.

INTRODUCTION by Jim Quay

It is a great pleasure to introduce "On the Waterfront" to you. I myself was introduced to the project in September 1983, shortly after becoming executive director of the California Council for the Humanities. Both the Council and its mission of bringing the humanities to out-of-school adults were relatively new to me when Judith Dunning came to my office to talk about her proposal. Ms. Dunning wanted to document an important period in the life of the Richmond, California waterfront, but she didn't want to write a study for scholars. Instead, she proposed to interview most of the oldest surviving waterfront figures, collect historic photographs of the port and its workers, and to create from these an exhibit for the public. Would the Council be interested in supporting such a project?

Happily, the two dozen scholars and citizens who sat on the Council then were interested and, convinced of the project's importance, voted to fund Ms. Dunning's proposal in early 1984. Six years later, I now know what I couldn't have known then: that "On the Waterfront" had all the features of a typical public humanities project: a powerful subject, caring scholars, a resourceful and dedicated project director, and uncertain funding.

You can appreciate why even the best public humanities project--and "On the Waterfront" is one of the best--doesn't easily attract funding. In a state focused relentlessly on the future, the next quarterly statement, the next development, the value of such a project doesn't show up in a cost-benefit analysis. Who would care about the lives of Californians past? Who would care about a waterfront whose boomtime is passed?

The answer is: thousands of people, as Judith's project proved. First and foremost, Judith, who didn't just study Richmond, but moved to and lived in Richmond. Like so many project directors, she gave time and life to this project far beyond the amount budgeted. In the language of accounting this is called "in-kind contribution"; in the language of life it's called devotion. Those of us privileged to know Judith know that the project both exhausted her and enriched her, and she has won the admiration of those who supported her and the affection of those she has interviewed and worked with.

After Judith came a handful of interested scholars--historian Chuck Wollenberg, folklorist Archie Green, and oral historian Willa Baum--who gave their time and expertise to the project. Next, a handful of people at organizations like CCH, Chevron and Mechanics Bank, who thought enough of the idea to fund it. Finally, eventually, came the thousands of visitors to Richmond Festival by the Bay during 1985-87 and saw the photographs and read the excerpts from interviews and realized that they too cared about these people. And now, you, the reader of these interviews, have an opportunity to care.

In its fifteen years of supporting efforts to bring the humanities to the out-of-school public in California, the Council has seen two great themes emerge in the projects it funds: community and diversity. "On the Waterfront" embodies both. I think such projects are compelling to us because in our busy lives, we often encounter diversity more as a threat than as a blessing, and community more as an absence than a presence.

"On the Waterfront" gives us all a chance to experience the blessings of diversity. The life details that emerge from these pictures and voices make us appreciate how much the people of the Richmond waterfront are unlike us, how much attitudes, economies, and working conditions have changed. Yet because the portraits are so personal and intimate, we can also recognize the ways in which they are like us, in their struggles, their uncertainties, their pride, and their fates. What seemed like difference becomes part of a greater sense of who "we" are.

In the lives of waterfront people, we can also glimpse how a community grew and waned. Busy with our own lives, we often neglect the activities that knit communities together. Judith Dunning's project allows us to see what we are losing and how communities are created and destroyed. And so, "On the Waterfront" fulfills the oldest promise of the humanities: that in learning about others, we learn about ourselves. For the gift of these twenty-six lives, we can thank Judith Dunning.

Jim Quay
Executive Director
California Council for the Humanities

March 2, 1990
San Francisco, California

PREFACE

ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

"On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," began in 1985. Interviews were conducted with twenty-six Bay Area residents including early Richmond families, World War II Kaiser Shipyard workers, cannery workers, fishermen, and whalers.

I was first attracted to this shoreline industrial town located sixteen miles northeast of San Francisco in 1982 while enrolled in a documentary photography class. For ten weeks I concentrated on the Richmond waterfront, often accompanying the crew of the freighter Komoku on its nightly run from Richmond to C & H Sugar in Crockett. It was then that I began to hear colorful stories of Richmond's waterfront and the City's World War II days.

The question which captivated me in 1982 and still does is--what happened to Richmond when World War II transformed this quiet working class town into a 24-hour-day industrial giant? With the entry of the Kaiser Shipyard, the number of employed industrial workers skyrocketed from 4,000 to 100,000. An unprecedented number of women entered the work force. The shipyards set speed and production records producing one-fifth of the nation's Liberty ships. By 1945 Richmond's shipyards had launched 727 ships.

There were other enormous changes. During the wartime boom, Richmond's population rose from 23,000 to 125,000. The ethnic composition of Richmond and the entire Bay Area changed dramatically with the influx of workers recruited from the South and Midwest. There was little time to provide the needed schools and community services. Housing shortages were critical. Twenty-four thousand units of war housing were built but they were soon filled to capacity. People were living in make-shift trailer camps along the roadsides and the all-night movie theaters were filled with sleeping shipyard workers.

James Leiby, professor of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley, called Richmond a "spectacular" case of urban development. What happened to other communities over a period of decades occurred in Richmond in a few years.

Some of the questions I wanted to explore in the interviews were--who were these newcomers to Richmond and were there reasons, beyond the promise of a job, which brought them in steady streams by trains, buses, and automobiles hauling make-shift trailers? And was this destination of Richmond, California, all that they had imagined?

Other questions were just as compelling. After the war ended and Kaiser and fifty-five other industries moved out of Richmond, leaving this new population suddenly unemployed, what made people stay? And for those who left Richmond and returned home to their families in the South and Midwest, what made them come back to Richmond a second time, often bringing relatives with them?

As intrigued as I was by this new population, I also wanted to know how Richmond natives experienced these changes. In a sense, as others moved in to find new homes in Richmond, the longtime residents were losing their once small and familiar home town.

Initially, I tried to locate people who were living and working in Richmond before the World War II boom. They worked in the canneries, at the Chevron Refinery, or made their living fishing in San Pablo Bay. Most of these first interviewees were California natives, born and raised in Richmond. But the majority of the interviewees for this project came from other places--Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa, Idaho, Utah--all to start a new life in California. Each one had a story to tell. Armed with a tape recorder, a camera, and lots of unanswered questions, I set out to record these local residents.

INTERVIEW SETTING

With few exceptions, the initial interview took place at the narrator's home. Because I was recording a diverse group, the interview setting varied dramatically. One day I might be in a neighborhood where residents, fearing stray bullets, keep their curtains drawn and their lights dimmed. Another day I would be in a home with a sweeping view of the bay, built by a former cannery owner during the Depression.

When possible, I recorded additional interviews and photographed at locations where the narrators had lived or worked. Some of these included the former Filice and Perrelli Canning Company, Ferry Point, Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, and the last remaining World War II shipyard structures...since torn down. I also spent many days off shore. When interviewing Dominic and Tony Ghio, fishermen for over sixty years, I accompanied them on dawn fishing trips in San Pablo Bay. However, following a turbulent twelve-hour whale watching excursion to the Farallon Islands with former whaler Pratt Peterson, I vowed to continue my research on land.

When I asked some project participants to give me a personalized tour of Richmond to see what landmarks were important to them, all too often I was shown vacant lots where a family home, church, or favorite cafe once stood. The downtown, once bustling with movie theaters, dance halls, and department stores, is eerily quiet for a city of 82,000. I found that local residents are still angry over the loss of their downtown district during the 1960s redevelopment era. Longtime residents spoke emotionally of the city losing its center. Hilltop Mall, built on the outskirts of town and accessible by automobile, was no substitute for a shopping district in the middle of town. The struggle to rebuild the downtown and to attract new businesses is an ongoing one for the City of Richmond.

After the interviewing was completed, there were photo sessions in the narrator's homes and former work places, as well as meetings in which we went through family albums and trunks. Some wonderful photographs and the stories behind them were uncovered during this process. Copies are included in the individual volumes.

PUBLIC USES OF THE ORAL HISTORIES

From the early stages of this project, both the text from the oral histories and the collection of photographs, have been used in community events. Examples include photo panels and maritime demonstrations at Richmond's Festival by the Bay, 1985, 1986, and 1987; and Oakland's Seafest '87. An exhibition, "Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers," produced in collaboration with the Richmond Museum in 1988, was developed from the oral history interviews with Dominic and Tony Ghio.

In an effort to present the oral histories to the public in a form which retained the language, the dialects, and the flavor of the original interviews, I wrote "Boomtown," a play about the transformation of Richmond during World War II. "Boomtown" was produced by San Francisco's Tale Spinners Theater and toured Bay Area senior centers, schools, and museums in 1989.

A new direction for the oral histories is in the field of adult literacy. Nearly fifty years after the recruitment of men and women from the rural South and Midwest to work in the Kaiser shipyards, some former shipyard workers and many of their descendents are enrolled in LEAP, Richmond's adult literacy program, where the students range in ages from 16 to 85 and are 70 percent black.

Our current goal is to make a shortened, large print version of the oral history transcripts for use by adult literacy students and tutors. We think that by using the true stories of local residents as literacy text, there will be an additional incentive for adults learning to read. The characters in the oral histories are often their neighbors, friends, and families speaking in their own words on such topics as the Dust Bowl, the World War II migration of defense workers, waterfront industries, family and community life.

THANKS

"On the Waterfront" project has had many diverse layers, including the University of California, the advisory committee, a wide range of financial supporters, and of primary importance, a large group of interviewees. I want to thank all of the project participants who donated their time, enthusiasm, and memories to this project.

Special thanks is due Jim Quay, Executive Director of the California Council for the Humanities, who has been a source of good advice and inspiration from the beginning. The Council's grant in 1984 got the project off the ground, kicking off the campaign for matching funds. Jim Quay's counsel last summer set in motion the completion of the oral histories by introducing me to the California State Library grant programs.

Bay Area historian Chuck Wollenberg and labor folklorist Archie Green have been my primary advisors, as well as mentors, from the early planning stages. Chuck provided insight into how Richmond's transition during World War II fit into the larger picture of California history. Archie Green reinforced my belief that as chroniclers of history we must continue to document the lives of working people.

From the preliminary research to the completed project, Kathleen Rupley, curator of the Richmond Museum, has been enormously supportive. Working in collaboration with Kathleen, and Museum staff Paula Hutton and Joan Connolly on the "Fishermen by Trade" exhibition was an invigorating experience as well as an excellent example of how two organizations pooled their talents and resources to create a popular community event.

Stanley Nystrom, a Museum volunteer and lifelong Richmond resident, has been a continuing resource to me. A local history buff, with a great sense of detail, he assisted me often.

Finally, I want to thank Adelia Lines and Emma Clarke of the Richmond Public Library, Sharon Pastori of the LEAP program, and Rhonda Rios Kravitz and Gary Strong of the California State Library for their support in making possible the completion of these oral history volumes and their distribution to several Bay Area public libraries which serve minority populations.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In my work I am most interested in recording the stories of people who are undocumented in history and who are unlikely to leave written records behind. For me, the strength of this project has been seeing the transformation in how the interviewees view their relationship to history. They came a long way from our first contact when a typical response to my request for an interview was, "Why do you want to interview me?" or "What's important about my life?" And "Why Richmond?" With some encouragement, many became actively involved in the research and the collection of photographs, and began recommending others to be interviewed. "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," became their project, with a life of its own.

This set of oral histories is by no means the whole story of Richmond. It is one piece of its history and one effort to generate community-based literature. I hope that it will encourage others to record the stories, the songs, and the traditions of our community members. They have a lot to teach us.

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

February 23, 1990
Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Dominic Ghio

Rapid talking Dominic Ghio holds the distinction of recording two hours of recollections on a one-hour tape. So animated about his life as a fisherman, Dominic barely stopped for a breath as he recalled his story. Often, interviewees need a certain amount of coaxing as they travel forty, fifty, or sixty years back into their memories. This was not the case with Dominic Ghio.

I had told the Ghio family over the phone that I tape one person at a time, preferably in a quiet location. We agreed that Dominic Ghio would be the first narrator. On the day of the interview I rang the doorbell and sister Louise Montalbano answered looking at me with a mixture of caution and curiosity. She summoned brothers Tony and Dominic Ghio, who were on the porch repairing fishing nets.

Dominic and I sat at the dining room table. My suggestion to interview him alone was not even considered. Older brother Tony and sister Louise took what was to become their regular stance at our weekly meetings. They stood directly over us.

What I had not realized was that they were in a relay position. When I asked Dominic a question, Tony and Louise would dash off in separate directions to retrieve family items to illustrate the story. Sometimes Dominic would jump up from his chair to join in the search, dragging his microphone behind him. During the course of the interviewing I had seen family portraits in ornate frames, crab nets from the 1920s, a charco-stove from their Monterey fishing boat, the Natale, and hand-carved weaving tools.

It was clear that a major part of the Ghio story was not being captured on tape and was in danger of being permanently lost. When I met them in the spring of 1986, they had begun to destroy their old fishing gear from the 1920s and thirties. Still, I pursued their story on tape.

It was a family saga of nearly one hundred years in the commercial fishing business beginning in Genoa, Italy. Parents Angelo Natale Ghio and Dominica Ghio emigrated to the United States in the 1890s. By the turn of the century, close to two hundred relatives had left Italy for America, many settling in San Francisco's North Beach. Following the

1906 earthquake and fire, a large number of family members moved south to Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, and San Diego, establishing themselves in the fishing industry.

Dominica Ghio died during the flu epidemic of 1918, leaving eight children including three-month-old Dominic. Two of the three daughters were sent to convent school and the five sons stayed in North Beach with their father. Pete, Angelo, Tony, and Dominic followed their father's footsteps as a fisherman. Only one brother, Nate, chose to work on shore. Dominic recalled some of his father's early advice, "When our father taught us how to fish and navigate, he knew right away if you had fear. If you had fear he said, 'The best thing for you is to get off the boat and look for a job on shore and don't go fishing because you cannot have fear.'"

In 1929, the brothers entered the shrimping trade, docking their boats in Richmond Harbor. In 1938, the Ghios had a thirty-foot Monterey Clipper built at the Genoa Boat Works at Fisherman's Wharf. It was named Natale after their father, and it was to serve the family for a lifetime. On summer mornings at Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, I joined the Ghio brothers on shrimping trips to China Camp, always bringing a camera and my sea legs. It was an opportunity to experience the beloved Natale first-hand and to see Tony and Dominic in action.

I realized that the Ghios' story needed to be presented visually with a strong hands-on element if people were going to get a glimpse into the occupation of a fisherman. I called Kathleen Rupley, curator of the Richmond Museum, and it was the beginning of a collaboration between the Museum staff, an oral historian, and the Ghio family.

The result of our work was an exhibition, "Fishermen By Trade: On San Francisco Bay With the Ghio Brothers," which ran at the Richmond Museum for six months in 1988. The exhibit displayed family portraits, recent and historic photographs of San Francisco Bay fishing, with text from Dominic Ghio's oral history. There were crab traps; authentically constructed models of a felucca, a lateen-rigged vessel and a Monterey Clipper; a shrimp cooling table and many more artifacts saved from the Ghios' basement.

During the course of the oral history project and the fishing exhibition the Ghio brothers became local celebrities. They were invited to demonstrate traditional net weaving at the Richmond Museum; Richmond's Festival by the Bay; Oakland Seafest; and the San Francisco Craft and

Folk Art Museum. They are among the last of the San Francisco Bay fishermen who still practice this craft. Weaving since childhood, Dominic recalled, "In the wintertime we had to learn to weave nets...we sat around the fireplace with the gear and started weaving and sewing net day in and day out, whether we liked it or not. When we made a mistake my father said, 'You made a mistake. Do it again. Do it over again until you get it right.' We all learned that way."

At these public events, sisters Louise Montalbano and Lena Scipi often accompanied their brothers, offering lots of details themselves about the life of a fisherman's family. Dominic would capture his audience on a variety of topics. I remember the day he spoke with great enthusiasm on the joys of eating whale salami, "The butcher marinated the whale meat, fixed it all up, and then ground it up and made salami. It was just like ordinary salami but it was a shade darker. It was delicious."

I developed a real affection towards the Ghio family and was caught off guard when Tony Ghio died suddenly last year. A consoling factor is that Tony did something he loved for his entire life. The brothers never stopped fishing. At the end of the interviewing sessions, when I asked them what they like to do in their spare time, without a moment's hesitation, they said, "We like to go fishing..."

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

February 23, 1990
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly or type. Use black ink.)

Your full name Dominic Ghio

Date of birth March 27, 1918 Birthplace San Francisco, CA

Father's full name Angelo Natale Ghio

Occupation Fisherman Birthplace Genoa, Italy

Mother's full name Domenica Ghio

Occupation Housewife Birthplace Genoa, Italy

Your spouse(s) none

Your children none

Where did you grow up? San Francisco, CA

When did your family first come to California? 1903

Reasons for coming Land of opportunity

Present community Richmond How long? 40 years

Education (and training programs) Jr. High School, woodshop

Occupation(s) Commercial fisherman

continued on back page

Special interest or activities net weaving, carpentry

Ideas for improving Richmond's image industry

What do you see for the future of Richmond? good

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Dominic Ghio

Family Background: From Genoa to North Beach, San Francisco	1
Stories of Mother, Dominica Ghio	6
Tales of 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire	8
Ghio Descendents in San Francisco	11
Memories of North Beach	13
Italian Immigrants	14
Move to Santa Cruz and San Diego	14
Description of Father, Angelo Natale Ghio	17
A Catholic Upbringing	19
Mutual Benefit Society	23
The Colma Cemetery	23
Changes in North Beach, Beginning World War II	24
Influx of Chinese	24
Childhood Entertainment	26
Learning to Cook at an Early Age	27
Preparing for Fishing Trips	28
Early Education	29
Ambitions as a Teenager	31
Net Weaving	32
Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco	34
Lateen Sailboats	34
Fishing as a Career	38
Last of a Generation	38
Docking in Richmond Harbor, 1930s	39
Impressions of Richmond in the Thirties	41
Decision to Shrimp out of Richmond	42
Daily Schedule	43
Migrating Shrimp	43
Chinese Shrimp Traps	45
Working for Different Fish Outlets	47
The Process of Cooking Shrimp	48
Transporting Shrimp to San Francisco	49
The Ghio's Shrimp Camp	52
Keller's Beach and Nearby Residents	54

The Depression Era	58
1934 Waterfront Strike	58
Local Cannery Work	59
The Ford Plant	61
Adventures in the Life of a Fisherman	63
The Element of Fear in Fishing	72
Modern Day Hazards: Crime at Sea	74
Hardest Aspects of Being a Fisherman	77
Incident with Navy Boat, World War II	79
Social Life	81
Decision Not to Marry	81
Sardine Boom Beginning Mid-1930s	87
Suspicious Cannery Fires	88
Changes in the Fishing Industry: World War II Era	90
Stories of Shipyard Accidents	96
Decision Not to Work in the Shipyards	98
Seafood: From Dog Shark to Whale Salami	100
Fishing: A Seasonal Occupation	102
Government Purchase of Fish During World War II	103
Food Supply for Internment Camps	104
Department of Fish and Game Regulations	105
More on the Sardine Boom	108
No Sardine Fishing During the Full Moon	111
Techniques for Catching Sardines	112
Types of Sardine Nets	114
Meals on Board the Sardine Boats	117
Trusting Fellow Fishermen	119
Theft of Crab Pots	121
End of Sardines: Effects of Japanese Current	125
Personal Opinion on Whales	127
Sea Lions: Obstacle for Fishermen	128
Changes in San Francisco Bay	130
Pollution in the Bay	132
Effects of Bay Area Bridges on Fishing	136
Changes in the Richmond Waterfront	139
The Parr Family on the Waterfront	140
Trend Toward Sport Fishing	144
The Public's Changing Taste in Fish	145
Supplying Shrimp for the Bait Shops	147
Alaskan Fishing	149

Lingcod	150
Introduction of Marine Species to the West Coast	151
Bass, Salmon, and Shad: Main Resources	152
Advice for Today's Fishermen	154
Garlic: A Good Medicine	157
Closing Remarks	165
APPENDICES	169

Family Background: From Genoa to North Beach, San Francisco

[Interview 1: March 6, 1986]##

Ghio: You want my name?

Dunning: Yes. What is your full name?

Ghio: Dominic Ghio. I was born in San Francisco, March 28, 1918.

Dunning: Where were your parents born?

Ghio: Genoa, in Italy.

Dunning: Do you know why your parents left Italy?

Ghio: In those days the population was big, and the young generation couldn't make a living, so they had to navigate on ships and see different parts of the world to move out, to make a living.

Dunning: Do you know what they were doing to make a living in the old country?

.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended.

Ghio: They were seamen at the harbor of Genoa. It was seaport to repair ships and go out to sea.

Dunning: Did your parents talk about Genoa very much?

Ghio: Oh, yes. They were very proud of it. I'm not saying one, or two, or ten, but the majority of the young generation all came to America because the story went on that it was a virgin country and there was opportunity to make a good living. This is way before the [1906 San Francisco] earthquake.

Dunning: Who was the first person in your family to come to the United States?

Ghio: It was my father.

Dunning: What was his name?

Ghio: Angelo Natale Ghio. My mother's name was Dominica Ghio. My father had two sons born in Italy and a daughter. They took them over to America when they were about ten, twelve years old. That's how small they were. Then my father started going back and got his brother to get his family, who had about the same amount of family like my father. So they both came over from the old country.

Dunning: Approximately what year was that?

Ghio: This goes back to about 1890.

Ghio: First my father came to America, then he went back, and then the two families came over. His brother's family and my father's family, they all came over at one time.

His brother, his sister came from the old country, too, at the same time. That was two brothers and a sister. They came from Genoa.

Dunning: Did they come directly to San Francisco?

Ghio: No, they came to New York.

Dunning: To Ellis Island?

Ghio: Yes. They came from there. Then they were transferred onto the train and came to San Francisco.

Dunning: Do you know why they chose San Francisco as opposed to the East Coast?

Ghio: The East Coast, they must have heard too many stories that there was too many people there. You know how New York is. New York was a big city. They figured there was too much people there. The immigrants that came from the old country, they already looked for work over there. They've worked in the mines. They've worked all over. They established a living so they stood* there, but the rest said, "We're not going to stop. We're just going to proceed to come to San Francisco."

*Throughout the transcript, Mr. Ghio uses the word "stood," meaning stayed.

Dunning: Did your family talk about that voyage on the ship?

Ghio: Yes. They came in like immigrants, five hundred or a thousand on a ship just to get to America. Once they got here, they said to their folks, "We're not coming back."

Dunning: Why?

Ghio: Because there was nothing to do. There was not enough work to make a living in Italy. What they had to eat was greens and chicken, and if you had the money you bought a steak. If you didn't then you just starved. They just continued working with what they had. Because in those days everything was very poor in Italy. The government didn't give them very much.

They had established themselves to go out and see different parts of the country and see if they liked it. If they didn't like it, then they had to move and come to California, which they did.

Dunning: Was the Mediterranean climate similar to California, or was it even colder in Genoa?

Ghio: It wasn't cold. It gets hot. Up there it was mostly like summer. When the summer comes the people all went on the beaches. It was very nice country. My sister that died, and my nieces, they went over and visited the Italian country, and they found very old buildings, before the Germans got there and destroyed it. If you liked it you went over there and you enjoyed seeing it.

Dunning: Have you ever gone to Italy?

Ghio: No, I didn't want to go. We said, "We were born and raised here. This is our country. We leave those people alone over there."

Dunning: Do you have any family still left in Italy?

Ghio: No, they're gone. They've been gone for over fifty, sixty years. They're gone. That's all we know. No relatives. They all came to the United States.

Dunning: Your grandparents, did they stay in Italy or did they also come to America?

Ghio: No, they stayed. They just stood there and managed their own lives.

Dunning: Did your parents ever go back for a visit?

Ghio: No. My father said, "Once I got to the United States, we're not going back because what we got here, you could say is very good and a lot of riches. Italy was very poor and poorer." In other words, there wasn't much to go back for.

Dunning: Did they ever seem homesick, to you, for the old country? Did your mother ever talk about being sad and wanting to see Italy?

Ghio: Yes, they talked and we had a few cousins in France on my mother's side. We would communicate through letters, but not very much. We just got to find out how they were doing and if they were getting along fine

Ghio: and that's all, and then call the story short because they didn't have no money for them to come over here. Money was pretty scarce then.

Dunning: Was Italian spoken in your home growing up?

Ghio: Yes. In the house we had to speak Italian all the way through. Then we went to school and we picked up English, American. But at the table we all talked Italian and with all our relatives we had to talk Italian.

Dunning: How many brothers and sisters in your family?

Ghio: There was three sisters and five brothers.

Dunning: Where were you in the family?

Ghio: I was the last one.

Dunning: You were the baby of the family.

Ghio: The baby.

Stories of Mother, Dominica Ghio

Dunning: How would you describe your mother? What was she like?

Ghio: She was a big, husky woman and very healthy. In those days we didn't have hospitals like we have today. It was all midwives and midwives took care of us.

Dunning: So were you born at home in San Francisco?

Ghio: Yes. No hospitals, just born at home. And then the midwife will register our birth certificate with the health department.

Dunning: Did your mother ever use home remedies?

Ghio: There were the old remedies back in the home country.

Dunning: Are there any that stand out in your mind?

Ghio: We would have used them if we could find the herbs to work with. [sister goes into another room and returns with several large framed family portraits] [tape interruption]

##

Ghio: My mother was a big husky woman--you could see it in the picture.

Dunning: Here's a big family picture. We've just seen some wonderful family photographs.

Ghio: We have proof.

Dunning: Can you describe a typical day for your mother when all the children were living at home, things you remember her doing?

Ghio: Not me. I wasn't born then.

Dunning: Well, after you were born.

Ghio: After I was born--I was born and she just left me at three months, so my aunt on my father's side, his sister, took care of me.

Dunning: Where did your mother go?

Ghio: She died.

Dunning: She died when you were three months old?

Ghio: Yes. At that time there was an epidemic of flu. She couldn't make it to take care of me so my aunt took care of me. She left me at three months. She was only in her forties when she died. At that time there wasn't medicine like what we have today.

Dunning: Right, because so many people died during that flu epidemic of '17 and '18.

Ghio: Yes. And there also was the first war when my oldest brother had to go in the service. It was the first war with France, Lots of soldiers came back with flus, sickness, and they brought a lot of germs.

Dunning: Did you lose any other family members during the flu epidemic?

Ghio: Yes. My brothers were with it.

Tales of 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

Dunning: One brother died?

Ghio: No. He died after the earthquake. He comes after the earthquake. I had a cousin. She was born in 1906 one week before the earthquake. So my uncle picked up the whole two families, put them on the boat and headed for Sausalito to survive, to get out of the earthquake. They lived on a beach in Sausalito. With what little food they had they managed to stay there because you couldn't go back to San Francisco. It was on fire. Then the army came. The soldiers came and they caught everybody to put them to work and try to help out San Francisco.

Dunning: When did your family return to San Francisco?

Ghio: After two or three weeks we went back, when my father was fishing up here with his son.

Dunning: Up where?

Ghio: At San Pablo Bay. When my father was fishing on San Pablo Bay, the earthquake came on. But they were fishing. They didn't think anything of it. As they were sailing, not running with power motors, sailing their boats to go home the next day, they got as far as Red Rock [in Richmond] and they saw San Francisco was on fire. So he told his father, "It looks like San Francisco is on fire. We're going to go home anyway. We're going to go back sailing to part of San Francisco."

When they got there, there was a watchman. My father said, "What happened?"

Ghio: The watchman said, "Well, we had an earthquake and San Francisco is on fire."

While they were looking up the hill, his house was still yet standing. He had made fresh wine. He had made new fishing gear. He said, "Where's my family?"

The watchman said, "Your brother took the whole two families to Sausalito. They're all over at Sausalito." The watchman said, "Don't go on shore. If they catch you they're going to put you to work. If you want to see your family you better start sailing back to Sausalito."

So my father went to Sausalito. He found his family. So they stood there for about a week managing to cook and everything. They had all the utilities they wanted on the boat. They had what they call a charco-stove. You burned charcoal wood. They cooked with that.

Then they said, "We're going to go back to San Francisco, not with the family, just to see if we can salvage something."

So when they came back after two or three days to San Francisco he looked at the house. The house was just vanished, burnt down to the ground. The majority of the people hid up Nob Hill. The other section went to Telegraph Hill. Then the ones down near Market Street, they all vanished up south of Market and up through the Mission District.

Ghio: But they didn't give up San Francisco. Although they had the loss, they stood there and they fought and worked to build San Francisco back up again the way it is today.

Dunning: Which area did your family relocate to?

Ghio: That would be in North Beach. Bay Street, in North Beach. North Beach was a section that was all the Italians. Then came Nob Hill that was the Americans and different people. Then came Telegraph Hill and that was all Italians and Americans mixed. Then down on Market Street, south of Market, was all the Irish. Those people that lived down there, they all went back. They worked and built all of San Francisco up again.

Ghio Descendents in San Francisco

Dunning: You weren't even born during this time, but you seem to have very vivid memories. Who told you the stories?

Ghio: Well, my father, my sisters, my aunts, they told us the whole story. But I had a cousin. Like I said, she was born a week before the earthquake. She was picked up with the mattress and went to Sausalito with the family. There were no doctors there. Whatever fisherman did, they all worked and tried to keep the family up. The family came back and built San Francisco up. I won't exaggerate, but on my father's side, nationality, we could be about a hundred, two hundred.

Brother: About that, yes.

Ghio: There were about two or three hundred of that nationality that came from Genoa to establish in San Francisco before the earthquake.

Dunning: You mean family members?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: You're saying one hundred to two hundred Ghio descendents?

Ghio: Yes, they all came from one Genoa. And they all established at San Francisco. They worked as fisherman and worked anything, whatever there was that was work to build it up. Also, my cousin, when he came from the old country, his mother had to go back because she had pink eyes.

Dunning: She didn't make it through the Ellis Island inspection?

Ghio: She didn't make it because her eyes were red and she had to go back to Italy for one year and then come back again. The train left. Her son was back in New York. They had to put a tag on him and ship him for the next train to come to San Francisco.

Dunning: He was just a young boy?

Ghio: He was just a young boy, say about six years old.

Dunning: What an experience for him.

Ghio: Yes. Then my cousin came to California after a week. In those days transportation was very slow. It took seven days from New York to come here by train. When he got in San Francisco he went to the Italian bank, the Bank of Italy, and he told them, "I'm lost. I'm supposed to meet my folks here."

So they held him there, and he spoke Italian. In the meanwhile, the same day down comes his father and his uncle, come down to meet him. There was an old man that was responsible to make sure he gets to San Francisco. But the kid got lost in New York and he was behind and the other fellow came on. That's how he got shipped over to San Francisco with a tag on his shirt. He had a piece of bread and salami.

Memories of North Beach

Dunning: That's quite a story. Did you grow up in North Beach?

Ghio: Oh, yes, we all grew up in North Beach.

Dunning: I know this project is about Richmond, but could we talk a little about what North Beach was like when you were young?

Ghio: I was born and raised in North Beach up until 1953.

Dunning: You were there from 1918 until 1953?

Ghio: Yes. Then we moved over to Richmond because my oldest brother, my sister, and my other brother were living in Richmond. In 1930, they left San Francisco and came to

Ghio: Richmond. In the 1940s, after the war, the Chinese people were expanding [to North Beach], so they started coming in to buy out different property and buy the Italian section out.

The Italian saw the money was good for the amount of money they paid for it, so they sold out. They were selling out, so the Italians all vanished, got out of San Francisco, and went down the peninsula. They moved all over to get out of North Beach because the Chinese people were buying the property double the price of what it was worth. When they [the Italians] saw that money they just sold out and moved out.

Dunning: In retrospect, I would think a lot of Italians would be really upset that they had sold out because the properties have gone up so much.

Italian Immigrants

Move to Santa Cruz and San Diego

Ghio: Yes. We stopped there. Going back after the fire when San Francisco was starting to get built up again, the population of my father's folks's relatives and friends didn't stay in San Francisco. They moved to Santa Cruz. I would say fifty to one hundred. They built up Santa Cruz. They found Santa Cruz, there was nobody there. There was just the beach, no wharf or nothing, and they went down there.

Ghio: They said, "San Francisco is getting more heavy in population so we're all going to go to Santa Cruz to establish a village." That's what they did. Santa Cruz was our people.

Then from Santa Cruz they even went as far down as San Diego. They didn't stop in Monterey. A few stopped in Santa Barbara. Then the rest went to San Diego. Down in San Diego there were the tuna boats that were fishing for tuna. My cousin, my father's nephew was there, and he established a big business down there on tuna. The majority went from Santa Cruz to Santa Barbara and San Diego. Up north, nobody went up that way. We all stood in the south.

Dunning: No one went up towards Eureka or that area?

Ghio: No, they just all stood south.

Dunning: You stayed towards the warmer climates?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: Did almost everyone in your family stay in the fishing business?

Ghio: Ninety-five percent stayed in the fishing business.

Dunning: Is it true that almost all the fishermen during that early period, the turn of the century, were Italian or Portuguese?

Ghio: Yes. Portuguese and Italians were fishermen in San Francisco. There were a few Mexicans. Mostly it was

Ghio: the immigrants that came from the old country that established San Francisco, and built it up, and were fishermen there.

Then, the rest of the generation of Genoa--like my father was on the seaport--the rest of the mountain up above Genoa, they were the same nationality, but they were all farmers. They came to San Francisco and they put up farm ranches down south of San Francisco, all the way down to San Jose. They put up farm ranches.

Dunning: How were they able to do that financially? Did they come with some savings?

Ghio: Well, the way I see it, we had Polidini, we had Giannini. We had say ten or twelve big shots of the Italians. So they wrote back to Italy and got these immigrants to come to the United States to work for them. They would appropriate the money for them to come to the United States. At that time, it was \$200 or \$300 worth.

Dunning: They would sponsor them?

Ghio: Yes. And then when the Italians came here they worked for these big shots, what they call rich people, and they worked for them on the farm, out fishing, anything they could do. They worked and paid their expense money of making the trip to come to San Francisco.

But the immigrants didn't have any money to come to the United States. They just say, "Well, I write to my cousin who says, 'Here, I'm going to send you \$200.

Ghio: Get on the ship and come to the United States and you got work. You come and work for me until you pay your mortgage off. Then you are on your own."

Dunning: I've heard some stories where it would be the men in the families, or the boys in the family, who would come over first. Was that true in your family?

Ghio: My father came here first to investigate, then went back and took the whole family to the United States. In other words, what he had to take was his two sons and his daughter, and his wife, to come to the United States.

So my father went to his brother. He said, "We're going to San Francisco. If you want to come along, just pack up."

They even brought wool that they harvested in Italy for a mattress, and brought that with them. As if the United States didn't have any wool. They had the woolen mattress, so they made a big bundle and dragged that along too, wool from the old country. So my father got his sister and his brother to get together and come to the United States and raise the family over here.

Description of Father, Angelo Natale Ghio

Dunning: I would like to hear a little more about your father. How would you describe him? I did see a picture of him and he seems like a big guy.

Ghio: He was a big, heavy-set guy and he didn't stand "No," for an answer. When he gave the rules, we all had to come jump and stand attention because that's how strict he was.

Dunning: He was very strict?

Sister: A very nice man, though.

Ghio: Yes. But he was a very kind gentleman that we were all proud to have.

Dunning: Do you think there are certain things he tried to hand down to you, pass down to you in terms of attitude or behavior?

Ghio: There was a must. Each family that had children, you visit. I had to go visit my aunt. I had to go visit my uncle every holiday, and on Christmas. Their children had to do the same thing and come and visit my father. It was like a happy family, all the time together. We couldn't not go over there, or be rude or anything. No, visiting was a must.

Dunning: Do you think your family had certain traditions that you think are strictly Italian?

Ghio: Yes, it was strictly Italian.

Dunning: Are there any that you remember--ways that you would celebrate holidays?

Ghio: Oh, we celebrated holidays. Sometimes we gathered around twenty, twenty-one in the family to get

Ghio: together. On Christmas, Thanksgiving, those are our main holidays.

My father was called Natale. He was born on Christmas Eve, before Christ, so they nicknamed him Natale, but his real name was Angelo Natale. He was born on Christmas Eve in Italy. He always kept that name there, Natale.

A Catholic Upbringing

Dunning: Was religion an important part of your childhood?

Ghio: Yes. It was Catholic. We're all Catholic. My father went to a Catholic school in Italy. Over there, when you got three or four years of schooling, you already passed the eighth and the twelfth grade over here. That's how the education was in Italy. It was very fast to learn and it was twice as fast as when we got here. In other words, when you got four years of schooling in Italy, then you already were up to the twelfth grade in America. That was your schooling.

[End Tape 1, Side A; Begin Side B]

Dunning: Did you go to the church that is still in North Beach now?

Sister: Oh, yes.

Ghio: Yes. We were born, baptized, and also that was our church.

Dunning: Is it called the Church of Saint Peter's and Paul?

Ghio: It's Saint Peter's and Paul. My sister got married in that church. My other sister and brother all got married there. Even Joe DiMaggio, if you heard of him, he got married in that church, too.

Dunning: That's quite a beautiful church.

Ghio: Oh, yes, very big. I had to go there every day after school to get my catechism to be Christian. They make communion and confirmation there. All the children had to go. It was a must. We only lived about two city blocks away from the church. When those church bells rang, we used to hear it every morning.

Dunning: You mentioned that your mother died when you were three months. Did your aunt raise the family after that?

Ghio: Yes. She had her family. She had two boys and a girl, and she also raised me.

Dunning: Did they live with you?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: In the same house?

Ghio: No, just two houses away. She raised us until we got up until five or six years old. Then my father took over. Then my older sister, she raised us.

Sister: Yes, but we went to the convent. Lena and I went to the Catholic convent.

Ghio: Yes. And when that happened [mother's death], my father put my two sisters in the convent where they took care of the kids.

Dunning: Is that a convent which is like a boarding school?

Ghio: Yes. It's a boarding school for them because my father didn't want to leave them to nobody.

Dunning: Where was that?

Ghio: That was on top of the hill of South San Francisco. It was a boarding house for the kids. Not only one. Four or five hundred, or a thousand Italian girls and boys all had to go up there because their parents had to work. That was right after the [1906] fire. They couldn't be bothered taking care of the kids so they sent them up there.

Dunning: Did you go to parochial school also, the Catholic school?

Ghio: No, we all went to public school. We went to the Sarah B. Cooper and the Hancock. There was another one. They called it Michelangelo. Those were the three schools within one city block.

I went to Sarah B. Cooper, and my sister went to the Hancock. My brother went to Michelangelo. He was teaching the Italian kids that came from the old country how to speak American. If they wanted to know

Ghio: something, they had to go to my brother--my brother was a dictator--to speak to them, to tell them what they were doing right or wrong.

Dunning: He was like the interpreter?

Ghio: Yes, he was the interpreter.

Dunning: Did you speak English in the public school?

Ghio: Oh, yes.

Dunning: Even though it was mostly Italian children?

Ghio: Even though we were all Italians, we always spoke English.

Dunning: How about your teachers? Were they of Italian descent?

Ghio: When we went to Francisco Junior High School they had an Italian teacher. They had a Spanish teacher, and they also had different nationalities of teachers to continue with the Italian. We just spoke Italian at home. On one block there was three two-family houses, and on that block we were about twenty-five, thirty families, and each family had four or five kids, and we all spoke Italian at home.

That's one city block, because over there the population was so big with Italians we were all bunched together in North Beach. We were all Italians, different nationalities. Like, I probably would go to a Sicilian house and talk his dialect, and his children

Ghio: would come over to my house and talk our dialect. We would just keep the Italian circulation that way, you see.

We were all families from one, two, three-story houses. We all helped one another. You needed help, we would come help you. We needed help, you would come help us. No pay, just a friendly family gathering, helping one another.

Mutual Benefit Society

The Colma Cemetery

Dunning: Earlier you had shown me a booklet from the Mutual Benefit Society. Was that a large organization?

Ghio: We were about five hundred, six hundred members. When the old people came from the old country, they established to buy some property in Colma. It was just five or ten acres because as the people were dying they had to go someplace to be buried so they made a cemetery out of it.

Meanwhile, while they were making the cemetery, it was getting bigger and bigger. My cousin, he was the president of that organization for over twenty years. It went broke, but the members that belonged to it had different outlets to help it to stay together to keep it up. Now today it is the biggest and richest. It's just like the Holy Cross and different cemeteries.

Dunning: Were there other Italian organizations that were established to help the newcomers?

Ghio: No. We were one group that we kept for ourselves. Then, the rest of the Italian people came in and joined. It cost you about \$400 to join and we always paid one dollar a month. We got doctors, medicine, half of the hospital paid and everything. Now today we haven't got nothing. We just got the burial plot there.

Dunning: So the benefits have really gone out of the picture.

Sister: Here's Saint Peter's and Paul Church. [brings out a photograph]

Changes in North Beach, Beginning World War II

Influx of Chinese

Dunning: We're bringing up so many different topics, I'm real curious about when you started seeing some of the big changes in North Beach?

Ghio: We were all together, happy, in 1940. When the war broke out, then the changes came on. The Chinese came in, and they started buying property. The younger generation went in the service, they got married, and the old folks needed the money. They all headed for the Peninsula and got out of North Beach. We got out of there in 1953, so it shows that that's when the changes came, in 1953. The population of the Chinese was coming in and the Italian people were vanishing, so that's when we got out of it.

Dunning: Was there much bad feeling between the Italians and the Chinese that were coming in?

Ghio: No, there wasn't bad feelings. It was just that the money was--say, North Beach was worth a million dollars. Well, the Chinese bought it for three million dollars. In other words, the money was at double value, so when the [Italian] people saw that they just sold out.

Dunning: Did your family own the property?

Ghio: No. We paid rent, and our rent at one time--the cheapest--was twenty dollars a month.

Dunning: For a whole apartment? How many rooms?

Ghio: Five rooms. And we all raised twenty dollars, thirty dollars for a whole flat, and then you had a basement, the place to store food away. That's how North Beach was. We all lived on twenty dollars, twenty-five dollars a month, just for rent. But there was only gas. That's all there was. There was no electricity or nothing.

Dunning: When did the electricity come in?

Ghio: It was coming in, but as far as I can remember, we had gas in the streets. The streetlights were gas. The man used to come every afternoon about four o'clock, start putting up the lights, and then every morning at six he'll come and start shutting off the lights.

Dunning: What decade are we talking about now?

Ghio: I was born in 1918. You give me six years, that would be 1924 or '25.

Dunning: What was your rent when you left in '53?

Ghio: It was forty dollars when we left. And the streets were made out of cobblestones. Horses had to carry the groceries or anything else up the hills. It was all cobblestones.

When we were kids they were starting to break down the streets putting in the water lines and the gas lines and then start paving it and make all cement. It was all done by horses and manual labor.

We were so friendly, so happy go-lucky that we were tickled pink to get ten cents in those days. But a nickel, we bought a bag of candy and that would last us all day. Today you can't buy it.

Childhood Entertainment

Ghio: We used to go to the show. Our folks would give us ten or fifteen cents. Ten cents to go to the show and a nickel to buy an ice cream and go in the show and sit there three hours to see the movie pictures twice. That's all we had.

Dunning: It was pretty cheap entertainment.

Ghio: And we all enjoyed it.

Dunning: What else would you do for entertainment?

Ghio: We did a lot of athletics. We used to go down to the playground. We used to play with the toys that the playground had. They had checkerboards, they had a basketball, tennis. They had all those games, and when the playground manager opens up the door about eight, nine, or ten o'clock, then we went in and we got the toys and we went out and played. We stayed there all day and just played in the playground. One city block was all playground for the kids. And we'd play marbles.

Dunning: Did you have household chores?

Ghio: No.

Sister: No, we did it.

Dunning: Oh, the sisters did it?

Sister: The girls did it.

Learning to Cook at an Early Age

Dunning: I was going to ask. The boys got away without doing chores?

Ghio: We didn't have house chores, but we had to learn to cook. Our fathers taught us how to cook.

Dunning: From what age?

Ghio: From age six all the way up.

Dunning: Do you remember the first thing you were taught to cook?

Ghio: Yes. We had to stay in the kitchen and watch my father. With one dollar, two dollars, you went to the store and you bought bread, you bought meat, you bought vegetables, eggs, and fruit, and came home. The peddler used to come and throw us a case of peaches, potatoes one dollar a sack, a hundred pound sack. Fruit by the cases, seventy-five cents a case. It was all surplus fruit and vegetables that the farmers down at the fruit market had left over. Then the peddlers picked it up and they came and supplied the families. Every block had a peddler selling potatoes, tomatoes, anything you want. The peddlers used to go from door to door. For seventy-five cents or one dollar we got vegetables, potatoes, everything. That's how cheap they were. It was all surplus.

Dunning: So you would do a lot of the errands, too?

Ghio: Yes.

Preparing for Fishing Trips

Dunning: When did you actually start cooking? I know the sisters probably had to do most of the cooking.

Ghio: Well, no. You see, we were taught by our fathers to stay home and watch how he cooks. Then, we were on our own, say we had to go fishing. We had the utilities all on the boat. We had everything. We had to live on

Ghio: the boat. We didn't go home until Friday or Saturday, and Sundays start all over again, go back out fishing again.

Dunning: So you would be gone for four or five days, or longer?

Ghio: Yes. Just go out fishing, bring in your catch, unload, then go back, buy your loaf of bread, and go back out. We did all our cooking on the boat. My sisters were in the day home taken care of, so there was nobody else home. We all had to be out working.

Dunning: You had to learn to be pretty independent.

Ghio: Yes, we were all independent. Each fishing boat had everything just like at home. No radios. There wasn't no radios, just charco-stove, dishes, pots and pans, and your groceries, and you'd stay out all week.

Early Education

Dunning: I do want to get into that, but first I want ask you a little more about your schooling, how long you were able to go to school.

Ghio: Well, everybody, if they went up to the sixth grade they were lucky. I went up to the third grade. I graduated from grammar school. Then we went up to the high school and I went up to the tenth grade. From there, my father was getting old and I said, "If you go to work, I'll go back to school, and if you stay home then I go to work."

Ghio: So that's the way it is. My sister went up to the third grade, and I went up to the third grade. My brother couldn't make schooling. He went to very little schooling in those days. He used to cry when you would separate him from the father, mother, or the aunt. He used to cry and he couldn't go to school no way.

Dunning: I'm a little confused. You said you went up to the third grade, but then you said you went to the tenth.

Ghio: When I said the third grade, that's the way the schooling was in Italy. When you went up to the fourth grade in Italy, it was just like us going to the twelfth grade over here.

Dunning: Right. But when you were here how many years did you go through?

Ghio: All the way through. I went to when I was seventeen. At seventeen I quit and went to work, and worked and worked all the way up to now.

Dunning: Whose decision was it to leave school?

Ghio: It was my idea because my father was getting old and he worked hard to raise a family. Now, either you stay home or I go to school, or else I quit school and you stay home and I go to work.

Dunning: You must have been awfully close to graduation?

Ghio: Yes. I went to work. At sixteen I was making my own wages, running a boat and working and making my own wages. All of us were making our own wages.

Ambitions as a Teenager

Dunning: As a teenager, do you remember some of your ambitions? Did you have an idea of what you would do with your life?

Ghio: I used to watch people work: mechanics, plumbers, carpenters. When we were kids we used to go where they were working and sit there and watch them all day. Then, when we were going to school we didn't think about being a plumber or a mechanic or something like that. We took our father's footsteps as a fisherman. He took us out. The first chance we had we all went fishing with him. We used to work with him and he would teach us how to fish.

But we didn't say, "I'm not going to be a fisherman." We had only one brother. He said, "I don't like fishing." So he stood on the beach working warehouses and canneries. He didn't get to be a fisherman.

The rest of us were all fishing. My father took us all out when we were seven, eight years old to start going fishing, first chance we get to go out and teach us.

Net Weaving

Dunning: Do you have any recollections of your first trips out?

Ghio: My brothers and my father were working. We just sat there and watched how they worked. We watched them and we watched them day in and day out, keep watching them doing the same thing.

Dunning: So you were learning just from looking?

Ghio: Yes, looking. Then in the wintertime we had to learn how to weave net. All the fishing gear my father had that was broken, we sat around the fireplace with the gear and start weaving and sewing net day in and day out, whether we liked it or not.

When we made a mistake my father said, "You made a mistake. Do it over again. Do it over again until you get it right." We all learned that way.

Dunning: Would the girls in the family do that, too?

Ghio: No, the girls were doing the washing and helping with the cooking. Then we just did the repair work and mended nets.

Sister: You go downstairs and they're still mending nets. Just take a look downstairs. [refers to back porch which is filled with fish nets]

Ghio: You start weaving and sewing and learning that when you're young. I was four or five years old. Now, here's another thing. My father, instead of going to

Ghio: San Diego to move out of San Francisco after the earthquake, he went and bought a ranch up in Novato. It was a vineyard and an apple orchard. He went up there with shoes. He had to come back with no shoes.

In three years. His boy, the oldest, he had a fishing boat and he was fishing. My father went up there to be a rancher, raise chickens and everything.

He said, "This is not my work." So he dropped everything. He went to the next farmer and he said, "I'm leaving you all the property to sell. You give me my money when you get it. I'm going back to San Francisco to be a fisherman again. This is not my line of work."

Three or four of us, we were all moved up to the ranch and worked there for two or three years. We didn't like it at all. We all came back to San Francisco.

Dunning: Did you miss the water?

Ghio: We missed the water and we had to go back to the water. That was very great. My father said, "No way I'm going to see a piece of dirt anymore. I want to see the water. I know I'll make a living. At least if I catch a fish I can eat it." In the land you can't eat it. You have to wait six months to wait until something grows.

We would have gone down south but the family was very young. My father's uncle said, "You come down here. Bring the family. Don't worry about a thing.

Ghio: I'll give you the boat and net and fishing gear, and you go out and catch all the fish you can and bring it in to me and the family will be taken care of."

We didn't want to. The move was too far. He said, "I'm making a living here. Why go way down there."

If we would have gone down there, today we could have been multi-millionaires because at that time the fish were so tremendous that you have to have the boat and the fishermen to go get it and bring it in. Today, you have to go way out in mid-ocean in foreign countries to get it to bring it over here. In those days, you went two or three hours out in the ocean, you caught your fish and came in.

Dunning: Now you have to go out a hundred miles, or--?

Ghio: You go a hundred and two hundred miles.

Dunning: That far?

Ghio: Yes. That's the law now.

Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco

Lateen Sailboats

Dunning: What was Fisherman's Wharf like? Is that where your father's boat was?

Ghio: Fisherman's Wharf was at the foot of Broadway Street. It was just a pier with pilings and it was all lateen sailboats. It was all sailboats. Then the state came in and took over and they moved them around to Hyde Street. They gave them that piece of ground on Hyde Street to build a wharf. And then the wharf was building up. In our time there was, say, a majority of a hundred small boats, sailboats and everything. When we left, it was five hundred Monterey boats like this all in the wharf going crabbing and combing for fishing.

Dunning: This was in the fifties?

Ghio: Yes, it was in the fifties. They multiply.

Dunning: You mentioned lateen sailboats. Was that modeled after the Mediterranean boat?

Ghio: Yes, it was the way they had it in the Mediterranean. The boat builders in Italy came here and they built them. They got a little place and they started building those Mediterranean boats over here. The boats didn't have engine power. It was all by sail.

Dunning: Could you describe that boat for me? Oh, your brother is showing me a picture.*

*A lateen-rigged boat is a vessel with a triangular sail attached to a long yard suspended obliquely from a short mast.

Ghio: Now, this is the Fisherman's Wharf. This is the way we used to weave the net. But I have better pictures than this, pictures of the lateen boats.

Dunning: How would you describe the lateen boat?

Ghio: They were twenty-eight feet shallow, and they had one mast, and had the sails up, and no power, and oars.

When my father was old, when he got old, his hands were callouses. In other words, from all the skin pulling the nets and rowing, he had callouses. You couldn't cure them no way.

The fishermen went day in and day out. They left the family. He couldn't stay home and take care of the family. It was up to the mother to take care of the children, see that they were dressed up proper, see that they were fed, and taking care of them. The father used to leave on Sunday afternoon and not come back until Friday, and work back and forth.

All the mothers had to raise their children that way. And all the fishermen, they all did the same thing. The other nationalities of fishermen did the same thing, raised their own families. The men went to work in the morning and came back, back and forth.

Dunning: They would just come back but they wouldn't have a chance to go home or--?

Ghio: Yes, they would go home to clean up or buy a little groceries and go right back out fishing again. There was no time wasted because with sailboats, you have to

Ghio: meet the tides. As tides were coming in, you had to be on your way to catch a fish. Then you had to meet your tides and go back again.

The only entertainment we had was just to go see a movie. That's all there was, or go to church. Movie and the church, and play out in the streets. I mean play out in the streets, not on a sidewalk. There was no traffic at all. There were a couple of Model T Fords and Stars, old cars, and they were just beginning to multiply. With \$500 you bought a brand new car in those days.

Dunning: What decade are you talking about?

Ghio: I would say 1924 or '25. Model As and Model Ts came out. But they didn't have schools of driving. My brother had the first license and a Model T Ford. He got his license and it was good all the way for the rest of his life.

Finally one day, he got caught driving a modern car. The cop stopped him and he looked at his license and he said, "This is your license all right, but we're collecting all these back. You have to go back and renew it." After twenty-five or thirty years he had it and he did something wrong. So he had to go back and go through the tests and get his new license. They took his original license away from him.

Fishing as a Career

Last of a Generation

[Date of Interview: March 12, 1986]##

Dunning: During our last interview we went into your family history. We got up to the point where you were leaving school to become a full-time fisherman. I would like to hear some of your early memories of when you started fishing full-time, and what it really meant to be a fisherman.

Ghio: When we quit school the majority of the neighborhood were fishermen, and all us kids took the footsteps of our fathers of going fishing. We are the second generation to start in to go fishing. After our folks are gone, then we pick up from there and go. Now, the third generation are not doing fishing at all. They got smart and they just said, "Pop, Dad, no. No fishing for us."

Dunning: So your generation was the last.

Ghio: Our generation now, which we are living, and we're all in our sixties and seventies. But their children do not want no intention of going fishing.

Dunning: How do you feel about that?

Ghio: Well, they should continue with their father's footsteps like we did, but no, they just got an education that they would like to be working on shore and do something else. See, in our time, we didn't

Ghio: have the education like they have today. It was hit and run. You had a chance to go to school. You went to learn your education. Then after that, you were on your own. You were either working with your father or doing odds and ends work. At that time money was scarce. Everything was scarce and we had to pitch in. Not that we were forced to, but we were occupied that way there.

Docking in Richmond Harbor, 1930s

Dunning: When you first started fishing, was it right in San Francisco Bay?

Ghio: It was in San Francisco Bay and San Pablo Bay. We used to commute. We would park our boats in Richmond. That was in the 1930s. And we slept on the boat five days a week. Then, from Richmond we used to go commute home and get changed, take a bath and do what we had to do. Then on a Sunday evening in the afternoon we'll go back and do it all over again. Three hundred and sixty-five days of the year all year round.

Dunning: So you really were only home in North Beach one day a week?

Ghio: One, two days a week. Unless there's a storm or say foggy weather and we can't go out. Then we would stay home.

Dunning: Where would you dock in Richmond?

Ghio: Richmond Harbor, at that time, was right off of Cutting Boulevard. The harbor now sits there and they got yachts, they got cruises and all that. For the amount of people we were, we were just--well, if you see ten people all day you were lucky.

Dunning: When you were out fishing?

Ghio: No, when we came to shore. Because that's how far away we were from the main part of the city of Richmond. See, we were all by the waterfront. There was slow business around the area there. There was nothing but fields. A few people there had a little business. That's all we would associate with.

Dunning: The harbor, was that at Cutting and Canal Boulevard?

Ghio: It was a channel that the government made. We went in there and parked our boats and worked back and forth. We would leave two or three o'clock in the morning. It depends on where we had to go. We put in our six, eight hours work, and then we were back home again. Then we had the afternoon off. We would just loaf around until the next morning.

Dunning: You would loaf around in Richmond on the waterfront?

Ghio: Yes.

Impressions of Richmond in the Thirties

Dunning: I would like to hear some of your first impressions of Richmond, particularly the waterfront. You've seen, I'm sure, so many changes since then.

Ghio: At that time, Cutting Boulevard was just a street. Once upon a time there was trolley cars running there, and there was no cars, and just a few trucks commuting back and forth. We just went in the harbor. We did our work, we went in the harbor, and we would just sit around there because we didn't have buses or anything to take us uptown.

Dunning: No transportation at all?

Ghio: No transportation. We stood [stayed] there, you see. From there, when we used to go home, sometimes we went home with the boat from Richmond to San Francisco, park overnight, and then come back the next day on a Sunday.

That was a lot of work so we just started commuting to go uptown to catch the bus, go to El Cerrito, and catch the train. From the train you went to Oakland, and when you got to Oakland you got to transfer to the ferry boats. From the ferry boats we got the trolley car to get home to North Beach.

So we would start at eight o'clock. We didn't get home until about twelve, one o'clock in the afternoon. It was so beautiful that we weren't in a hurry. There was no rush. People were more friendly, and there was

Ghio: nothing to disturb us. We just went on and on like that. Then after a while came the bridges and Treasure Island. That all started building up.

Decision to Shrimp out of Richmond

Dunning: I'm curious as to why your family chose Richmond as a fishing site.

Ghio: My brothers, my oldest brothers, which one is gone and the other is still living, and my father, they talked it over, and my brother Tony here. They said, "Why should we be doing all different kinds of trade in the line of fishing?"

What we did, we have learned and worked and made money. My brothers got together and said, "Why are we killing ourselves to do that kind of work when we could do four hours work and go home and sleep all night and no wear and tear, nothing to worry about?"

My father taught us how to catch fish, how to make nets, and we did all different kinds of trades. That starts from a shrimp all the way up to a shark, all that kind of fishing. After a while as we were working we said it was easy to stay in one trade, so we picked up shrimping industry. This goes back to 1929. That was easy work and we made the same amount of money like the fellows that went for sardines or they went for salmon or crabbing. Their work was twice as hard as what we were doing.

Dunning: So that was pretty much a family decision?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: Do you think it was a good decision?

Ghio: Oh yes, very good, because one of my brothers, the oldest, he did the trade like they did at San Francisco, go out on the ocean. He said, "It's no fun."

You have rough weather. You have to stay on the boat for weeks and weeks and back and forth. And your wages were very low, say an average of sixty dollars or seventy dollars a week bringing in tons of fish. That wasn't right for them to do that, so we just said, "We'll stay in the bay and we'll make a living like they are making a living out in the ocean."

Daily_Schedule

Migrating Shrimp

Dunning: I would like to hear an example of an average day for you in the beginning when you were shrimping.

Ghio: When we were with my brother, I was working with my oldest brother, and our average work was four hours, five hours a day, go fishing, come in, unload, do our work, and then rest, and then go back again the next day.

Dunning: So you would really only be out for four hours fishing? Did that include travel time?

Ghio: It depends where we had to go. Like when we parked in Richmond near Cutting Boulevard, to go across the bay would take us about an hour or an hour and a half. If we had to come up to San Pablo Bay, like to China Camp, well, that used to take us two hours. Then, as we were wanting to go farther, like Petaluma, or Sonoma, or Napa, or Vallejo, it would take us three hours. That's just going one way to get our catch and come on home.

You see, the shrimp does not multiply in one area. Today they are here, tomorrow they might go another place, say fifty miles or twenty miles away. Through experience, we would know more or less from year to year where the shrimp would migrate and grow. That's how we would keep up with our fishing.

Dunning: How close would the shrimp be when you were in Richmond? Where would be the closest point?

Ghio: The closest was outside the estuary [Richmond Channel]. In other words, say twenty minutes. We worked there because in the wintertime, the rains would wash everything out. The first shrimp would come through Southhampton Shoals and inside the estuary. We worked there say a month. After that we would go another month, say to San Rafael, in that area. If the run was good we probably stayed there two months or three months working back and forth.

Dunning: By China Camp?

Ghio: No, this is near San Quentin, before the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge went up.

Dunning: The bridge was completed in '56.

Ghio: Then when the shrimp disappeared there we went to China Camp. From China Camp we came all the way up to Vallejo and fished. We worked back and forth the whole year round, day in and day out. We were about fifteen boats, all doing the same thing. We had a job that the buyers will buy the merchandise, and you went fishing. If they didn't buy it, then you were stuck. You had to wait for your turn to sell your merchandise.

Dunning: Was there much competition among the fishermen for the fishing spots?

Ghio: There was no competition. It was just the companies that were buying the merchandise, for them to send you out to fish. It was so cheap that Spengers, the two brothers, Paul Spenger and Frank Spenger, they were in the shrimping industry way back in the 1920s. They're the ones that invented the shrimp net. When they went fishing themselves they used to see the shrimp in the water but they had to figure out how to catch them.

Chinese Shrimp Traps

Ghio: The Chinese people were the first ones to set out traps in the bay. Hunters Point, Alameda, then they came right outside of Richmond and they set traps there. Then they went up above, like China Camp when the season was there and set these traps out.

Dunning: Would you describe the traps that the Chinese designed?

Ghio: They're made like a shrimp net. The only thing was that they didn't have the spreaders, the arms on the net. They were in a circle and like a funnel. They were on posts in the water and anchored. They depend on the tides to bring in the shrimps. Then when the tide changes they used to go out, catch the shrimp, pick them up, put them on the boat, then turn the net over and catch the next tide for the next run of shrimp.

They always stood still. Their fishing equipment was always anchored, and they used to work from tide to tide. This time of the year, for them, the shrimp was very scarce because the rains and the floods would wash everything out. But in March, April, the shrimp will appear back again in the bay. In February and March, the fishermen will work Hunters Point, and in May, June, and July they'll have their run of catch for the season in San Pablo Bay.

Then we come in in July, August, September, all the way until the next winter. Then we have our run of catch. The catch was average--within one hour you already had five hundred pounds of shrimp caught in the net. That's how thick and multiplied they were. With four hours of work you already had a thousand [pounds] to a ton of shrimp on the boat to come in to get unloaded.

Then you waited for the next day and you would do it all over again. But the price at that time was one cent or a half a cent a pound. In order to make twenty-five dollars or thirty dollars on the day you had to put a thousand pounds to fifteen hundred pounds

Ghio: of shrimp on the boat per day to seek your daily wages. It isn't like today that people go to work and they get forty dollars or fifty dollars a day, and some of their work is fifty dollars an hour. Ours was just strictly what you caught. What the company would offer you, their price, you had to stay with it.

Working for Different Fish Outlets

Dunning: Were you actually hired by a particular company?

Ghio: We were on our own. The only thing, we went around and looked for work. In other words, say this company [says], "I need shrimp next month. Would you like to work for me?"

Then you went to work for him providing if he had money. If he didn't have money you couldn't go out because it's no use in working and catching the merchandise and don't see no wages, which had happened. Money was scarce, and before he sold the merchandise it took him maybe a week or a month before he could turn around and say, "Here's your money that you got coming."

Most of the merchandise we caught was cooked, dried and sent to Manila. The dried shrimp all went to Manila and China. Our local shrimp, the big ones, after they were sorted out, went to San Francisco, and they shelled them and picked them and made shrimp meat for cocktails to eat for salads.

Dunning: Can you give me examples of some of the outlets that you would fish for?

Ghio: First we fished for Spengers. Then we fished for Quan Sang. He had a shrimp camp in Richmond. Then we fished for Diamond Shrimp Company, and then there was Lincoln Shrimp Company.

Dunning: In Richmond?

Sister: No, San Francisco.

The Process of Cooking Shrimp

Ghio: In order to make the companies buy the shrimp, we had to make sure that it was cooked right away. The minute we came in, those shrimps went in the cooking pot. Then they got cooled off. They were delivered in San Francisco the same day for five cents a pound. Then the Chinese people would sit there and pick them and make shrimp meat and make cocktails.

Dunning: Would you be responsible for cooking them?

Ghio: Yes, we would be responsible for cooking them, because there was an art of cooking them. If you don't know it they'll spoil.

Dunning: What is the art?

Ghio: The art is, when you cook them you had to take them out of the hot water, separate them, and then the shrimp goes on the table to cool off. They had to be cooled

Ghio: off within an hour so they won't get hot and ferment and spoil. Then you got to put them on the platform and let them dry.

Dunning: Actually, your day was a lot longer than four hours?

Ghio: Yes, it came longer because in order to sell your merchandise you had to satisfy the companies. At five cents a pound you had to do the work, or else you had to stay home the next day, because they were slow motion and they didn't have no intention of working fast, the Chinese people. They were just slow motion, the way they worked. So we would want to work and get our week in. We liked to put in four or five days a week so we could see wages. That's what we used to do.

Transporting Shrimp to San Francisco

Dunning: Would you have to deliver the shrimp or would someone come to you?

Ghio: The company had the trucks. They would come and get the shrimp. At one time in Richmond, there used to be a trucking outfit in Point Richmond, Johnson Trucking. Once a week or every other day they used to pick up the merchandise and deliver it to San Francisco by truck.

Then on Cutting Boulevard there was a father and son. They had a towboat and two big barges. Anything that had to be shipped from Richmond to San Francisco, they would pick it up, and the same day that boat or that barge would deliver it to any part of the Bay Area.

Dunning: So you had an agreement with them?

Ghio: Yes. He used to charge us maybe a half a cent a pound on the weight.

Dunning: Did that work out pretty well?

Ghio: It worked out good. You see, we could not use the Santa Fe barges or the Southern Pacific to haul the merchandise.

All our farmers up in Mendocino County, when they got through harvesting their grapes or their pears, it went on freight cars. Also the milk. The farmers, the cattlemen, their milk went on freight cars.

Then it came to the train depot at say, Sausalito. It went on the barge and it was delivered in San Francisco. From there, what they had in San Francisco would come over here. There were no bridges, no Golden Gate, no San Francisco Bay Bridge, and all the transportation you had to do it yourself or get some company that would do it.

Dunning: You said that you couldn't use the Santa Fe or the Southern Pacific rail?

Ghio: No.

Dunning: Was that a rule they had, or was it because it wasn't fast enough?

Ghio: No, that was rough cargo. In other words, it's tonnage. They went by tonnage. The ferry boat was the

Ghio: only one that we could go on with a small amount of cargo and deliver it to San Francisco.

Dunning: Would you use the ferry boat?

Ghio: Yes, we used it.

Dunning: Was that the ferry boat at Ferry Point?

Ghio: No, they were operating in the morning and in the evening. They weren't on the delivery schedule during the day.

Most of the ones that were running every day were in Oakland. They used to go back and forth every half hour by the hour. When you got down there you sent your merchandise to San Francisco. Then there was these little barges, towboats. Say, one would probably go to San Rafael and pick up on a cargo there, and then there was another that would come from Petaluma in the morning and go back at night, pick up all the eggs and whatever they had. They'll go to San Francisco and dump the cargo. Whatever there was in Oakland, it went from Oakland to say Hunters Point. There was big train transportation there for heavy cargo.

Dunning: So that cargo connection was really important to you?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: Was there ever a time that you got stuck with a lot of the shrimp?

Ghio: No. If you didn't make it today, it would go the next day. As long as they were taken care of and they were cold they wouldn't spoil. Then you could deliver them the next day.

But the quicker you got them out of your hands you say, "I'm through. Whatever they spoil on the other side, that's their problem. They can't give us the blame."

The Ghio's Shrimp Camp

Dunning: I talked to one person who was a child in Richmond during the Depression. He talked about going up on Cutting Boulevard, and some of the Chinese shrimpers would be there selling shrimp from roadside stands. They were from a pretty poor family and he and his friend used to sneak some of the dried shrimp away, and then his mother would use it to cook at night.

Ghio: You see, before we put up these shrimp camps the Chinese people had the shrimp camp on Point Molate. That's way before we got here. They used to catch the shrimp and the few people that were living in Richmond--it was just a handful--they used to go and watch the Chinese people cook the shrimp.

Later on when we started putting up shrimp camps, it was a strict law if they want to buy the shrimp you could buy it at ten cents a pound, get all you want and go home.

Dunning: Would you have many local people coming to your shrimp camp?

Ghio: No, because if you gave them the habit to come, then you would never get rid of them. So we just made it a strict law [that] just our friends were entitled to buy them. We didn't want the public, so we just made a strict law we don't want nobody there.

Dunning: I'm curious as to who else was at your shrimp camp? What other fishermen?

Ghio: Did you talk to any old people there in Point Richmond?

Dunning: Yes.

Ghio: Did they ever mention Duke Sterling?

Dunning: No.

Ghio: Duke Sterling was born and raised in Point Richmond. His brother was something like in between an attorney and notary public. In Point Richmond there was a bank. That's all there was, and a tiny handful of people living there. Duke was the oldest that was born and raised there. He died at the age of eighty. He used to walk from Point Richmond all the way to the boat at three or four o'clock in the morning and go fishing and come back and do it again, day in and day out.

Then there was Peterson. He was a Norwegian fellow. He lived at Point Richmond. We used to go up there in the evening and chitter chatter. He used to live where the firehouse is just on the side there

Ghio: fifty yards. He had two or three little bungalows there that he used to rent out.

Then on the corner up above where the bar was, well that was Kennedy. Frank Kennedy's father and mother had all of that corner. There was a boarding house there. Then down the corner going south there was a bakery, and the fire department. Then there was a little theater. There was one little grocery store, and there was the Mac Hotel. Then on Washington Street years ago there was a bank. The majority was Italian people in that community.

Dunning: Would you ever socialize with the Italians from Point Richmond?

Ghio: Oh, yes. While we were sleeping on the boat for four or five days, we went up to the Point Richmond and there were two or three Italian restaurants. We put in our order that we want a table in the evening, a full course dinner, for Monday to Friday. They used to have our table. For seventy-five cents you had a three-course, four-course dinner. That's how it was.

Dunning: So you would go every afternoon?

Ghio: Well, in the evening. Then from there we would stop, buy our groceries, and we would go back on the boat.

Keller's Beach and Nearby Residents.##

Ghio: You know the tunnel [Garrard] where the Richmond Plunge is?

Dunning: Yes.

Ghio: You go under the tunnel and right there was a beach.

Dunning: Keller's Beach?

Ghio: Yes. Now, Mr. Keller had a few little rowboats, and he lived right above the beach there. Every day he used to rent the rowboats and people used to fish around there. Then on a Friday or a Saturday evening he used to give a fish dinner. The people would come and eat some fish and also drink beer. Then on Sunday the kids would all go down the beach and go swimming or play around the beach.

Dunning: This is when you could still swim there?

Ghio: Yes. But then Mr. Keller was very nice. We associated with him. He had a little ways to pull up a boat, to paint it, to fix it. He lived right above the hill.

One evening he was going home from there, which it was a hundred yards. He was held up. He got hit over the head. Inside of a week he died. That's how he died, by somebody holding him up. They wanted to rob his money, and that's the story of that. But still, Keller's Beach is always there.

Around the corner, go down say a hundred, two hundred feet, there was an Italian family homesteading there on the hill.

Dunning: The Bernardi brothers?

Ghio: Bernardi.

Dunning: Do you know them?

Ghio: Yes. We associated with them. One of the brothers, when we came to Richmond he was digging clams.

Dunning: Which brother? Tony or Leo?

Ghio: Tony. He was digging clams and selling them on a little stand they had in the harbor. He used to average seventy-five to a hundred and fifty pounds a day. Then he had Chinese customers who would come and buy fifty a hundred pounds per day. Then he'd save a few for the public. That's how he was making his living. That's Tony.

Dunning: They're really up there in age now. They're in a convalescent home.

Ghio: Yes. Then after that, well naturally he couldn't do it no more, so he went and worked for the university school as a gardener.

Dunning: At UC Berkeley?

Ghio: Yes. He was a gardener there for over fifteen, twenty years. Then as he got older he couldn't do it no more. We just heard about him the other day. Sometimes he gets out and he goes to do a little walking and shopping, then goes back again. He has a sister that is older than him. She had a grocery store in Richmond on Macdonald.

Ghio: When my sister came here to Richmond, she used to shop, buy groceries right there. Then all the way down Macdonald they had little stores and people used to commute back and forth to buy, walk all the way down, buy, and then go all the way home.

In the wintertime, the water used to go into stores. There was no drainage. They had a little transportation. They had buses if you wanted to go to Berkeley or El Cerrito or go to church. That's all the stores that were on San Pablo.

Medigali. This fellow Tony's sister was named Medigali. She was the first one that had the grocery store down there. Then there was other Italian people that had the bakery and grocery store all the way down the street on Macdonald.

Dunning: You spent so much time in Richmond, did you actually feel like a Richmond resident?

Ghio: Oh yes. Well, I got my first driver's license here in Richmond. When I got out of school I got to be eighteen. Then we knew the cops here. I went up to city hall, passed my test, and got my driver's license for one dollar. My first driving license was here in Richmond. I practiced in San Francisco with friends of mine. They had a grocery store, and we used to go deliver and then we used to learn. He used to teach me how to drive and we just helped one another back and forth.



The "Natale," a twenty-nine foot Monterey fishing boat built by the Ghio family in the 1930s.



The Chio brothers inspecting their fishing nets (circa 1955). Left to right: Dominic, Tony, Pete, and Angelo.

Photograph courtesy of the Independent, 1955



Cooking shrimp in boiling water. Lincoln Shrimp Company,
Pt. San Pablo.

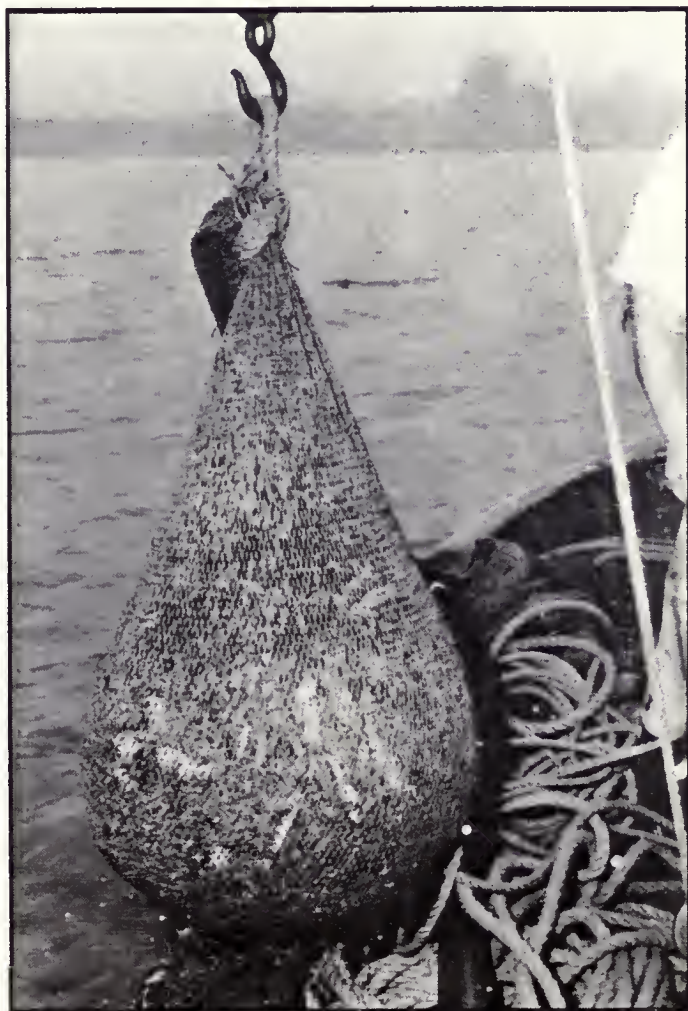
Shrimp cooling table.



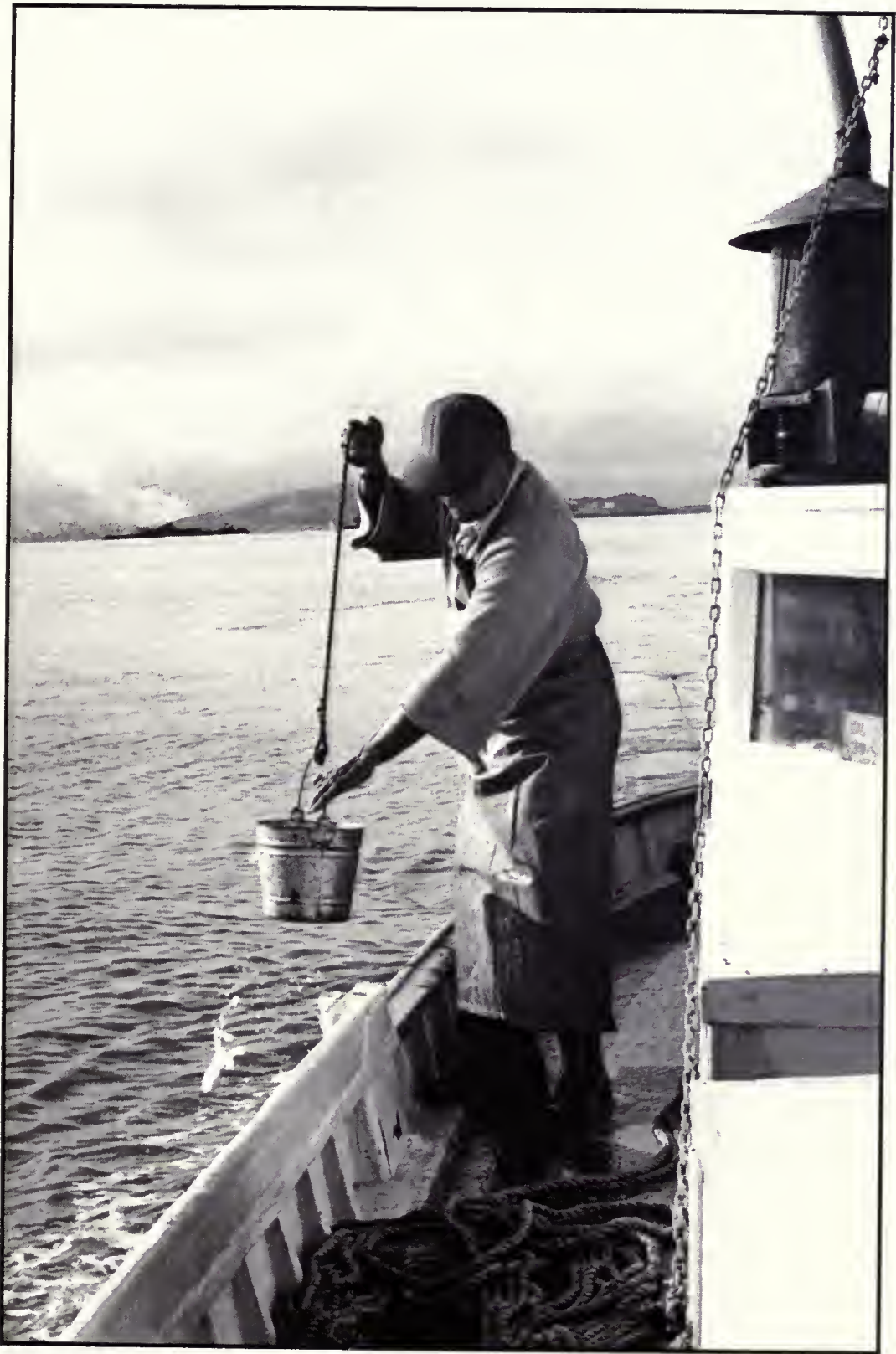


Dominic Ghio sorting the shrimp, 1986.
Unwanted species are returned to the Bay.

Hoisting net aboard the boat. The net has about 150 lbs. of shrimp, but can pull up as much as 1000 pounds.



Photographs by Judith K. Dunning



Tony Ghio hauling water to wash down the deck of the "Natale".
1986.

Photograph by Judith K. Dunning



Photograph by Judith K. Dunning



Above: The Ghio family
at the Festival by the
Bay, Richmond, 1986.
Top: Dominic Ghio,
Tony Ghio. Bottom:
sisters Louise
Montalbano and Lena Scipi

Right: Interviewer
Judith Dunning at
Festival by the Bay
oral history display
featuring the Ghio
brothers.



Above: Dominic Ghio
demonstrating net weaving
and repair, 1986.



Below: Dominic Ghio setting
up the net weaving booth at
the Festival by the Bay, 1986.

Photographs by Judith K. Dunning

The Depression Era

1934 Waterfront Strike

Dunning: I want to ask you about the Depression era. I know we've been talking about that period, but I'm wondering, did it affect your industry, and how?

Ghio: Yes. It affected everything. If you want to go back in the Depression when the stevedores and warehousemen, they all went on strike.

Dunning: That was in '34.

Ghio: That's when they first began to organize a union. To organize a union, two fellows, stevedores, were killed because the strike was so strong that they were killing one another. I think five died during that strike. We got so panicked about it that we stood home. We didn't want to go fishing so we had the money reserved to buy groceries and stay put. We didn't want to get involved with the strikes that they had then.

Dunning: You didn't want to break the strike?

Ghio: Yes. It went on. Finally after six months, they got organized. Then the unions started stepping in. The Warehousemen and Stevedore's Union came out then. That's when the unions started coming up to be strong.

Dunning: During those four or five months, did you not work?

Ghio: We would not work. Because it didn't pay to go out and make fifteen or ten dollars a day. If you were forced to, you went. If you didn't you just stayed home.

Local_Cannery_Work

Dunning: Were you ever a member of the union?

Ghio: No. My sister was. The warehousemen, when they went on strike and fought to build a union, my sister was one of the first ones to join the warehouse union. That goes way back. They were working for ten dollars or fifteen dollars a day at the cannery picking strawberries or peaches. The boss used to pay cash. There was no such things as checks.

Dunning: Was this at the Filice and Perrelli cannery in Richmond?

Ghio: No, it was in San Francisco. There was Del Monte Cannery, there was S&W, there was Wellman Pack Company. All those kids, they got out of school, and they all went to work for the canneries. San Francisco had one, two, three, I would say four or five canneries. At Del Monte Cannery, the Chinese people from Chinatown used to walk all the way down to the waterfront to have a job to work for the cannery for fifteen dollars. My brother worked for them for ten dollars, fifteen dollars, handling cans to put on the machine to pack, say peaches or tomatoes.

Dunning: Ten or fifteen dollars a week?

Ghio: Yes.

Brother: A week.

Ghio: All the fruit and produce came in by freight cars from different parts of Santa Rosa, San Jose, and Mendocino County. It all came in on freight cars, and then the canneries used to put them in the basement to mature and then they went upstairs to be canned.

At that time when the fruit got on the train they were packed on the freight cars, but there was cold air going through it. When that ferry boat at that freight barge crossed the bay for an hour and a half, it used to chill the grapes, chill all the fruits, so they wouldn't ferment. By the time they got to the cannery they were just cooled off and they went into the can.

If you packed that fruit while it was hot, then the fruit would ferment and spoil. But the trip, it took the ferry boat an hour or a half hour. That fresh air would cool the temperature of the fruit down. Your tomatoes the same thing. There were tomatoes as big as two pounds, three pounds, one tomato. That's how big they were at that time when they were shipped in to go to the canneries.

Dunning: I've heard quite a bit about the Filice and Perrelli cannery in Richmond. I interviewed Joseph Perrelli, who was one of the founders. They brought a big group of Italian people from the Gilroy area to work in the cannery.

Ghio: Yes. That's why when we went to Richmond to eat, they had a hotel or boarding house upstairs where the Italian people used to live. They'd do their work at the cannery, and then go back and forth. Some worked the whole year, or a season at the cannery. Some they laid off for about a month, two months in the wintertime. Then they went back to work again.

The Ford Plant

Ghio: What brought Richmond up, too, was the Ford plant. We had a big Ford plant in Richmond. That took a lot of people to work, too. All the parts of the Fords were shipped in by freight. The Ford people had a little freighter. Once a month it used to come in loaded with motors and cars and everything. Then they would unload them. Then they used to make the Fords and send them out.

Then, when the city raised the taxes, Ford didn't like the idea of being raised so they moved down to Milpitas and they put up the Ford plant down there. They took a lot of people away from Richmond.

Standard Oil was standard. Standard Oil used to hire all the time. It had Italian people working there. Then there was the Southern Pacific, the trains. They had to hire a lot of people. All that transportation was under the tunnel to the train barges, San Francisco, and back again. They were back and forth. Every hour, half hour, there was a cargo of freight cars coming in through.

Dunning: I've heard some stories where people have said that the Italians dominated the waterfront in both San Francisco and Richmond. Would you say that's true?

Ghio: What do you mean, "dominated"?

Dunning: Well, they were in the majority. It was hard for someone else to break in unless they were Italian. I heard that from a non-Italian.

Ghio: [laughs] Well, like I say, there were the big shots, and they would hire maybe a hundred or two hundred Italians from Italy. They came in as immigrants. When they came here they had to go to work for these people. There was Ghirardelli, there was--oh, I could name--

Dunning: The last time you mentioned Giannini.

Ghio: Yes. All those people, they had work for them. When they came to the United States, they worked and worked for a year or two until they got on their feet. Then they paid their bills to get here. Then they went on their own.

At that time, gold money was used. There wasn't silver money. It was all gold money. Everything was paid by gold. One gold coin would be valued at five dollars.

Dunning: Would you actually be paid like that some of the time?

Ghio: Yes. When my father came here he was paid with gold money, and he used to get three gold coins. That used to qualify as fifteen dollars for the week.

Dunning: Where would he turn that gold in?

Ghio: To the bank. The bank at that time was all gold and everything was transacted with gold money. Then the paper came in, then your silver and all that.

Adventures in the Life of a Fisherman

Dunning: Since you are a fisherman I want to concentrate also on the fishing industry. You had told me about a typical working day when you would go out early in the morning and then come back and cook your fish. I'm wondering what life was like when you were actually out in the bay.

Ghio: To us it was an adventure of fresh air and something new. It was an adventure. In other words, everything was free. Your fresh air was free. Everything was free to you. It was more fresh air and everything. But when you work on shore, well, naturally you had smoke, gasoline, and all that to be suffocated. But when you got out on the bay you were free to inhale all the fresh air you could. It was a healthy life.

Dunning: How many would be on your crew?

Ghio: Just a one man job. One man.

Dunning: You went out by yourself?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: But you would go on your own boat and your brother would go on another?

Ghio: He had a boat, I had a boat, my brothers had a boat, and we all worked together. One man to a boat.

Dunning: Okay. Then you would go anchor in a certain area?

Ghio: We would just go fishing out and then we come in. We would all tie up together. That's one trade. Then there's other trades like catching smelt, catching other fish. Then you would accumulate help. Then you would have maybe one or two people on the boat to work to hurry up to get your catch and come home.

Dunning: But for the most part you just worked on your own?

Ghio: One man, yes.

The five hundred boats at the Fisherman's Wharf, they were all individual working men. They go out crabbing by themselves, do their work, and come back in. They go fish for salmon, they go out and stay two weeks or a week up in Point Reyes, wherever they want to go, and they fish all by themselves, all by hand. They pick up maybe five hundred [pounds] or a ton of fish a day, all done by hand. Then there were sardines and other trades. They all did it--one man jobs.

Dunning: That's pretty young to go out there all by yourself. Do you consider yourself a solitary man?

Ghio: No. There was no fear. In other words, when it was rough weather it was up to you to judge the weather if you would like to go. If you didn't you turned around and stayed home. If it was foggy and you wanted to navigate, you couldn't see, that was your own opinion to go and come. Then you would say, well, if you needed help I would leave my work behind and come and help you, or if I needed help you would leave your work behind and come and help me.

We always worked two to three boats together when we had to navigate to go out, because if you break down there was the other part of the family or friends who will stand by until you got close to shore and got help.

Dunning: Would you try to stay within sighting distance of each other?

Ghio: Yes, sighting distance.

Dunning: I was going to ask you if you had certain rules aboard your boat, but you were own boss.

Ghio: The rules were to be smarter than the other guy and to catch the fish and come in. That was the rule, try to beat the other guy to catch the fish.

Dunning: Would you feel that among your own family?

Ghio: Oh yes, we tried to fight one another. There was my brother Pete, he was the champ. We couldn't keep up with him. He was so fast, so active, that he used to be always tops on us because he was fast, he was good.

Ghio: Then we would be right behind him. Not that he beat us, it was just that maybe we were slow, say a half hour, twenty minutes different compared to what he was working. He used to work fast. He was a fast worker. Sometimes when he brought in a ton, we would probably come in with fifteen hundred pounds of shrimp or maybe a little more. It depends how the day went. But we all worked together.

Dunning: At sea, would you ever be able to yell to each other?

Ghio: Oh yes. We worked as far as twenty-five, thirty feet apart. We would be navigating one another and we would be talking when it was calm. When it was rough we spread out a little bit and did our work and watched one another. There was times there was rough weather. One that had more power would go back and watch the other fellow until he gets his work done to come in together. We wouldn't leave one behind.

Dunning: Was that a rule?

Ghio: It was our ruling that we liked to see each other. When we all came in, we came in at one time.

Dunning: Were there ever occasions when somebody was missing or didn't come in?

Ghio: Yes, there were occasions for us. The engine breaks and we have no telephone or nothing. We used to anchor out, and the next day your own brother would come out and say, "What happened?"

Ghio: "Well, we had engine trouble. We can't come in so we stood [stayed] out." But we always had food on the boat to hold us for two days.

Dunning: Were there ever occasions where you felt really nervous about someone in your family?

Ghio: No.

Dunning: In all those years?

Ghio: My sister did. We got broke down. We went out. We were over at China Camp and we broke down. The engine broke and me and my brother figured, we had a friend over there, that he would come out and help us. We waited. A storm came that day. We were safe but we didn't have transportation to get on shore. We were stuck. That day there we didn't come home. We broke down around ten o'clock in the morning.

The next day friends of ours, they came out and said, "What happened?"

"The engine broke. I couldn't contact nobody. Nobody was out on the bay. So we just stood there." Then they came out and towed us in.

Sometimes the coast guard would come over and pick us up.

Dunning: Do you think you were calmer than the people on shore waiting for you, like your sister?

Ghio: Yes. She was worried and she would panic and say, "What happened?"

Sister: [agrees]

Ghio: Now, we have radios so that we can call home. We have all that equipment. At that time the men went to work and everything was okay up to Friday. If you didn't report in by Friday, then we know there's something wrong.

The way we used to fish, there would be a hundred or a hundred and fifty boats, and you always go out and come in and you always had somebody that came in. Say I didn't show up today, well that one boat that came in, he says, "They're okay. We left them. They're okay. Tomorrow I'll go out and they'll be coming in the next day." We go day in and day out, around the clock.

Dunning: So there was a network of communication?

Ghio: Yes. The communication was with the other boats associating back and forth.

Dunning: Would you consider the work you've done dangerous or hazardous?

Ghio: It is dangerous. In other words, we shouldn't be out there doing that kind of work.

Dunning: What is the dangerous part?

Ghio: The danger is when it's foggy and when your boat is overloaded with fish. Then you have to make the sign of the cross and keep your fingers crossed to get home with the catch.

Dunning: Have you had any close calls in your career?

Ghio: We had a lot of close calls. My brother and I, we were up in Bodega and it got foggy at three o'clock in the afternoon. We didn't get in until the next day. I told my brother, "Let's get close to shore and throw the anchor, and the next day when the fog lifts we'll go home."

In the meanwhile, on shore the report was that we didn't show up. Friends of mine called the coast guard. They said, "It's foggy. We know they're fishermen. They should be in with us. They didn't show up." They were worried, friends of ours.

Then the next day, my brother-in-law was fishing. He said, "I know where they are. We just got through talking to each other. They must have got stuck in the fog. We were about a hundred, two hundred boats trying to get in one little tight space to get in port. The ones that were born and raised there, they even got lost." So it was the fog that held us back from trying to get in.

Dunning: That seems to be a pretty dangerous area anyway. Every year you read about fishermen being lost in Bodega Bay.

Ghio: Yes. Then another time I was on a big boat to come out of Bodega to go fishing. We were four people on a boat

Ghio: and a big boat. We had our fishing gear out in the ocean. To get out, it was a south wind and a big sea. You couldn't get out in the ocean. So we all went in a little bay in Bodega Bay.

We stood there two days and three days until the sea calmed down and then went home, to go out and catch our gear and pick it up. Then when we wanted to go out, the waves were so big that we all had to hold on and pray for the boat to climb the waves to get over the hump. Once we got over the hump, say within five or ten minutes, then it was nice and calm. Then we proceeded.

Through the Golden Gate there were times where we were twelve men on a boat and we got halfway out and it was big sea, rough weather. We were in the breakers. In other words, waves.

The skipper says, "If we go out, we won't be able to turn around and come back in. We have to go out to the Farallones and stay there and then turn around and come home." He said, "What do you want to do?" He called up the crew to come on deck and said, "If we turn here, in fifteen minutes we're home. If not, we have to go straight out in the ocean."

We all hesitated. He said, "Well, we'll take a chance." So the skipper and fishermen, they went through the channels. We all had our equipment on, ready. He said, "Okay boys. Stand by. Here we go."

Ghio: As we were going out he was counting the breakers, the waves. He said, "Now we're going to turn." So they hooked the motor right open and made the sharp turn. The minute we made the turn the boat took a list like she was going to turn over. Then they straightened it out right away and we got the waves in the back and that way we came in. Or else we had to go all the way out in the ocean and stay there or turn around and come all the way back.

There were boats out there. They said, "We can't work tonight. It's too much big sea and rough weather."

Halfway out we said, "If we make the turn here, in fifteen minutes we're home." The other way we would have to stay half of the night out.

Then we see fog. When we were going to San Pedro. Day and night, nothing but fog, and you're navigating to leave Monterey to get to Santa Barbara. Day and night with the fog. And no radio. We had a radio to listen, but we couldn't talk.

On another boat where we were fishing for sardines, there were five other boats. We were all in line. The other boats all went from marker to marker, shore to shore, and we were all side by side. We were say three miles out and they were within a mile out. When we got to a certain destination we were the second boat to tie up, and they came and we talked and ate and slept, and from there we proceeded.

Ghio: But we did a lot of hard work. It was all manual labor. And the sardines at that time they were valued forty dollars a ton and we used to get one dollar out of it. For every ton of fish we put on the boat we got one dollar.

Dunning: You would get one dollar, and--?

Ghio: The skipper would get the rest because he has to guarantee us that the motor will run. He's got to guarantee the net is strong enough to catch the fish, and he's got to produce the work for us to see wages. If he didn't we just got off the boat because it didn't pay to go out and spend your time out there and didn't see no money. He had to make sure the boat was equipped for us to go out and come back and make a catch.

The Element of Fear in Fishing

Dunning: I want to ask you if there are any superstitions connected with going out on the boat. You often read about it, that there's certain folklore about the sea.

Brother: When you go fishing like that you've just got to forget about it, don't have fear. If you got fear you won't go fishing.

Ghio: Yes. In other words, when our father taught us how to fish and navigate he knew right away if you had fear. If you had fear he said, "The best thing for you is to get off the boat and look for a job on shore and don't go fishing because you cannot have fear."

Dunning: And that's what one of your brothers did?

Ghio: Yes. You have to have courage to go. If you didn't have courage to go you would lose out on the day of fishing.

Dunning: Why do you think you had the courage to go?

Brother: He was young.

Ghio: Because we were young!

Sister: [laughs]

Ghio: Hey. Our minds weren't thinking what we think today. Our mind didn't think about bad weather or storms or fear or anything. We just proceeded. That boat there, there was me, my brother, and another friend of ours. He was a fisherman.

Dunning: You're pointing to a picture right now. What's the name of that boat?

Ghio: The Natale.

Dunning: That's the Natale?

Ghio: Yes. This boat here, we were fishing all night catching herring. Right now you see this boat. It sits one foot out of the water. When we had this boat loaded with fish it was down to the deck. The water was on deck. We had to cross San Francisco to get to San Francisco from Sausalito. Rough weather, foggy,

Ghio: and here we are. We're loaded, and with no life jackets on. Just say, "Everything's okay. Let's go proceed and go in and get unloaded."

There were seven thousand pounds of fish on one boat. We would do that day in and day out until we got tired. The net we had, the lead used to hit our hands and our hands used to swell up like balloons. Then we would go home and bathe them, and then the next night do it over again until you got your week in. When you got your week in you said, "Well, that's it. I'm done."

Modern Day Hazards:--Crime at Sea

Dunning: In this picture is this you coming in to Point San Pablo?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: That's hard to imagine that the boat would be almost down to the water. It sounds incredibly unsafe.

Ghio: Not safe. I'll tell you one thing we got fear of today, that it's not safe to sleep out in the bay. There's no more freedom for you to sleep out in the bay. You're just better off, if you were out in the bay, to come in to the nearest port, and throw anchor or pay to stay there one night.

Dunning: Now tell me why.

Ghio: Because there's so many boats that run around at nighttime you don't know whether you're going to be held up or they're going to run over you or steal from you. You don't know. That was the risk. But our times it was so free. There were no houses on the beach. All the bay was open for the people to fish, to anchor, to sleep. Today if you go and anchor in front of my property I'm going to get the gun and shoot you. I don't want you there. They're afraid that we might go and steal something. And then these hoodlums, they have little boats, and if they see a boat anchored out in the bay, they'll probably come up and sneak up on you and hold you up and steal what you have.

Dunning: Have you actually heard of incidents like that or has it ever happened to you?

Ghio: It will happen. In time to comes it happens.

Dunning: Okay, but has it happened? Have you heard of people getting held up on the boat?

Ghio: Oh yes, it has happened.

Dunning: Any specific stories you could tell me?

Ghio: Like say you go fishing, you're minding your own business. From shore they'll row out and they want to know who you are and what you want and what you're doing. If they see you day in and day out then they'll make up their mind, "Let's go to hold them up." Steal, see.

Dunning: Now has that happened to your friends? Have any of your friends been robbed?

Ghio: No, because we got smart--we just quit.

Dunning: When was the last time or era that you felt safe sleeping in the bay?

Ghio: Well, we were safe all the way around. See, we didn't carry guns on the boat. We were just ordinary people working. But the way the people are on shore, you don't know. It could be they got guns, and if they see you around they either shoot you or something. You don't know those things, but that's what can happen today. They're all out to steal and rob.

When we used to sleep on the boats you could have left \$100 there and go uptown, do whatever you want. When you came back that \$100 was there. That's how friendly we were. Now, today, you leave an apple there. By the time you get off the boat somebody's going to steal that apple. That's how mean they are to people today. We were all friendly people. It's you trust me, I trust you. That's the way we were. We were all friendly. But today, there are no friends. The friend is your money. You have the money, you have friends. If you haven't got this, they don't hardly want you.

Dunning: That's a pretty sad change.

Ghio: Yes. Just like now. When we were kids we used to go out and play till eight o'clock at night. We had to be home by eight o'clock at night. There was no radios.

Ghio: There was no television. There was nothing. Eight o'clock you were in bed and you got up at five o'clock in the morning to go do your chores and get ready to go to school.

Our time was slow motion and we all proceed to do the same thing over and over. You get one city block with twenty-five or thirty or forty kids. We all went to school at one time, come home. We all played. On one block. Now, you can imagine the area of North Beach, how many children there was, kids going to school.

Sometimes we walked a mile to get to school. Then once you got to school you played around. Then you run all the way home again.

Hardest Aspects of Being a Fisherman

Dunning: Getting back to your fishing, what are some of the hardest parts about being a fisherman?

Ghio: It's when you break down. When you break down you're saying, "Well, the gear is broke. We can't go out. We're unambitious to go out the next day. Here we are. We have to stay home, either fix the boat, fix the motor, or repair the net to get ready to go out," because you hate to lose the day. Once you lost the day you say, "Well, I lost the week."

If everything goes smooth then you made your week. But the minute you break down or your motor don't work right, well, you have to figure you're going to be lost

Ghio: for eight hours for repairs. Your net, if you've got a used net or a net home to replace it, then within two or three hours you went back out again. Then, in the wintertime, you repair all these gears to get ready for the next season.

Dunning: Would you be your own mechanic?

Ghio: Yes, you had to know your own mechanic work.

Dunning: Did you learn most of that from your father?

Ghio: Yes. The mechanic that did the repair work, he would teach us. As we go in for repairs, he would teach us different fundamentals of the motor because when we're out fishing and the motor breaks you had to fix it to get home. If you didn't then you were stuck and you had to wait for either your uncle or your brother to come out to tow you home.

Dunning: You really had to be a jack-of-all-trades?

Ghio: Yes. And cooking was the same thing. Navigation you had to do the same thing. You had to learn how to navigate yourself in case of fog or rough weather to get home safe.

Dunning: This is a little bit of the track but I'm curious. You began as a fisherman as a teenager. I just wondered how that affected your social life? Most teenage boys are going to want to be dating. How did that affect your dating?

Ghio: Well, we had very little enjoyment. Toys we didn't have, and our mind was always to play amongst the kids and then go fishing. All the kids within the neighborhood, 95 percent were all fishermen's sons.
[Mr. Ghio changes the subject]

Incident with Navy Boat, World War II

Ghio: There was one time me and my brother were working together. During the war, as we were coming home it was a clear morning. We were out in restriction area. It was during wartime. Here comes the coast guard. The navy comes out with fifty sailors on board and the skipper. The ship was anchored out in the bay. They saw us, that we were navigating to go home. No, they came out wide open, rammed right into us and wrecked us.

I said, "What the heck goes on here? Can't you see it's broad daylight? We had our running lights."

Then the lieutenant on shore had seen it. He called us in and says, "What happened? I know all about it. The sailors' shipmate shouldn't run out of the harbor that fast. He should go out slow. Then when he saw that it was clear, then he should proceed out."

The skipper of the crew wanted to get on the ship to go away. No, they were delayed for an hour until we got straightened out. It broke half of the boat up. We had to get repairs. The repairs ran to about \$900 to repair it, so the government paid for everything.

Ghio: I said, "Here we are. We're going to lose a week of work. Never sue the government. Play ball with them, even give them the money, but don't try to sue them because if you do you ain't going to get five cents. They'll go back to history in navigation in the 1900s and they'll tell you where your mistake is.

The best thing is to shut up and just say, "I got hit by you people, now what are you going to do?"

He says, "Are you going to sue?"

"No."

He says, "Well, the boat has got to be repaired." Then they'll tell you to go get it estimated. If you can find a carpenter that's willing to fix your boat up in time you go ahead.

It took us one week. The carpenters, when we brought it in to repairs, there was two experienced boatbuilders. They said, "What did you do, get hit by the navy. We got a list of them. Towboats, everybody is getting hit by the navy." They said, "The boss has some kind of a contract with the government, that any boats get wrecked, it's for him to repair them."

So we got hit. He says, "Here, sign the paper. I'll get two boatbuilders. They'll work on the boat. Right in the water, while the boat was on its side they repaired it. They took it all apart, then replaced all the parts inside of one week. That's how fast they

Ghio: worked. The boss says, "Here. I'll sign." We signed the papers. "Your boat will be ready by next week." And away we went fishing.

While we were signing he doubled the damage. Instead of being \$800 worth of damage he would probably put \$1600 worth of damage. We wanted a boat to go fishing.

Social Life

Decision Not to Marry

Dunning: I had asked you about your social life and we got into this other story. I'm still curious as to whether most of the fishermen got married. How about you and your brothers?

Ghio: When it comes Friday we hurried up to get our gear cleaned and washed so we could go home. Saturday we all dressed up and away we went to the show, or went to the dance. By Sunday you had to be on the job again.

But our activities were going to the show or the dance or parties. When the holidays come, well, naturally we all got together.

Dunning: Did you and your brother stay single?

Ghio: What?

Dunning: Did you get married?

Ghio: No, we didn't want to get married. We saw other people got married and things didn't go right. It turned wrong. I says, "Well, it's a gamble. It's a fifty-fifty chance." You can hit the right girl, you can hit the right fellow, and if everything goes good you get married.

Dunning: Plus, I think it would be a real worry for a woman to be married to a fisherman.

Sister: Yes, it is.

Ghio: Oh yes. Yes sir, because our mothers and every family that were fishermen, there wasn't only one or two children, there was five or six. The father had to go to work. The mother had to do the work at home. Her job was to raise those kids to behave.

If there was anything wrong, when the father comes home on a Friday, then they'll see the kids and say, "How come he got hurt? How come he's sick?" What would you do? You know your job is to take care of those kids, feed them and take care of them. He had his job to go out and worry about himself to come in with his catch and also see everything was okay at home.

Dunning: So there was certainly added pressure for both?

Ghio: Yes. See, the husband and the wife, they both had their job to do: you took care of the house, I take care of the fishing. I make sure that the money is coming home to pay for evervthing.

Ghio: The only thing the mothers had fear of is when their husband went to Alaska to fish. They didn't know if they were going to come home, and there was no way of corresponding. Now, up Alaska there were five or six canneries that buy all the fish that the fishermen take in. At that time there wasn't power motors. They were all sailboats.

When they went up Alaska they left in May. They had to be ready. In June, they got on the sailship and hauled from five hundred to a thousand people on that sailship with all the equipment, all the canning goods, and cans, and went to Alaska. They had to be up in Alaska by the last part of June.

July came. The first of July you had twenty days of fishing. All the fish you could get you just bring it in and unload. After the cannery did all their packing and everything, you could say, "We go home."

You had to stay and load up the ship with all the canned goods that the cannery put up and all your clothing and everything and then proceed home. It took them a month to get home. You didn't get home until the last part of August, and you only had twenty days of fishing.

The ship would leave here with six or seven hundred fishermen. Then they had Filipinos who were the butchers to go up there to work in the canneries. From there you had to pitch in. That's all the boss gave you, was \$200 or \$300, in addition to your pay, to get the ship loaded, and to get it unloaded.

Sister: These are the two guys you're talking to. [Sister brings out picture of Dominic and Tony]

Dunning: You've just shown me a picture of your brothers when they were young.

Ghio: Those were us.

Dunning: Okay. This is Tony and this is Dominic. Handsome picture. Eventually, I would like to make a copy of some of these.

Ghio: We were about twenty years old. I had a lot of hair. Now look.

Sister: What happened to his hair? Maybe you can write that in--

Dunning: Let's not get into that touchy issue.

Ghio: That there happened when I was a little boy. I had diphtheria. The doctor had to give me a shot or else I would be gone.

Dunning: So that's your theory about losing your hair?

Ghio: Yes. The doctor gave me the shot.

Sister: Yes, it's true. He got that darned diphtheria.

Dunning: Yes, but you got that earlier, didn't you?

Ghio: Well, I had the diphtheria when I was six years old. The doctor, when he came to examine me, he said, "You've got a bad sickness."

My sister, she was only eighteen years old. She had to run one mile and a half to the drugstore, get the medicine and the needle, and run back and give it to the doctor to give me the shot in the spinal.

Then he said, "You've got forty-eight hours [to know] whether you're going to live or you're going to die." At that time there was the measles, the mumps. Everything was going around.

So he gave me the shot and then I passed the stage of twelve hours. He said, "Well, he's all right now. He'll live."

Our doctor was a veteran doctor come from the old country.

Dunning: He was a what?

Ghio: A veteran doctor. In other words, he was in the service. He came from the old country and went to school here. Then he had to serve in the army and he was a doctor. He died at the age of seventy-five to eighty. We just lost our other family doctor. He died at eighty-six about six months ago. He was taking care of us.

Dunning: To move up a little bit further, I asked you about some of the hardest parts about being a fisherman and you mentioned mostly the equipment breaking down. That was

Dunning: the hardest. For you, what have been some of the best qualities or advantages to being a fisherman?

Ghio: The best quality or advantage was that you had to be smarter than the other. In other words, you have to show that you can do the work better than the next guy alongside of you.

In other words, say we're a group of fishermen working. You can't say, "Well, I'm going to loaf around," or this and that. You had to show how strong you are to beat the next guy alongside how to work. Then the word will go on and then the bosses want to hire. They ain't going to hire him because he's just a loafer. He don't want to work. He'll hire people that want to work.

You had to do double work for the boss and get only one wage. There wasn't no raise or nothing. You just got your regular pay and you had to show you worked twice as hard as the next guy.

Dunning: Under what circumstances would you hire out?

Ghio: Say I'm the boat owner, and I hire ten or twelve people. Well, I try to pick the best out of the majority of a hundred. Then they come and work for me.

Dunning: Did you actually hire people or were you hired?

Ghio: No, we were hired to the boss when we went. But for us, we did our own work. We all did our own work. We might hire one person to help us, but then that's it.

Dunning: Yes, but you have mentioned a couple of circumstances under which you were hired by someone.

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: I'm trying to figure out. Was it a particular season that you hired out or was it when the shrimping was really bad here?

Ghio: No, it was sardine season and you had six months to work. The best boats that you know through knowledge that they produce, you liked to be hired and work for them. Then that skipper, that boss, will hire you if he knows you and that you are a good worker.

Dunning: That's what I was trying to get clear. So was it during the sardine boom?

Ghio: Sardine season, and squid season. You know, like squid, that there was two months out of the year of fishing, and then you switch over to sardines.

Sardine Boom Beginning Mid-1930s

Dunning: Could you talk about the big sardine boom in this area that started in the mid-thirties and went to the forties?

Ghio: Yes. There was a lot of sardines. Sardines were in the bay and out in the ocean. At that time there was no demand for sardines. There was just a demand for sardines for bait use only. F. E. Booth, a fish cannery, used to buy a few tons of sardines for

Ghio: canning. He had a barge. He used to get the sardines, say ten or fifteen tons, run all the way up to Pittsburg and can them, and then come back. Then that was when you had the season. Then the rest was on your own again. Then you went back fishing on your own, whatever you wanted to do.

Dunning: When would the sardine season be?

Ghio: It started in August and it ends up in January. The season was over. You had four or five months.

Dunning: So during that time you would be hired on another boat?

Ghio: Another boat because there's where the money was made. If you were on a good boat you could average \$300, \$400 for three weeks work. Then you have one week off on account of the moon.

Did you see the Monterey Aquarium?

Dunning: No, I haven't.

Ghio: You go down there. You'll really enjoy it. The live fish, everything from salmons to sardines, anchovies, squid. It's a marvelous place to be.

Suspicious_Cannery_Fires_##

Dunning: You were just showing me a book called, Where Have All the Sardines Gone?, and you showed me a picture of the Depression time when the canneries were on fire. Could you explain that again?

Ghio: You see, when the cannery can't make it, well, what are they going to do? So they had to do something. Sometimes, by accident, the cannery burns. It gets on fire and then it burns.

Dunning: What do you mean, "By accident?"

Ghio: Well, they say, "Boys, we're going home to sleep. You're the watchman. If it burns, let it burn. We're going to collect insurance."

And the big boats, they did the same thing. Because if the money ain't there to operate you can't operate and own a big boat. So sometimes they would go out with rough weather and they would tell the crew, "Well, we can't make it, so protect yourself. We're going to run the boat on the rocks and get off and tell them the boat is lost with the foggy weather."

Dunning: Did that ever happen to you personally?

Ghio: Well, it never happened, but it could happen amongst the owners.

Dunning: He wouldn't admit it anyway.

Ghio: Sometimes there's three or four boat owners together, and if they can't keep the boat, then what are they going to do? Nobody will want to buy it. They haven't got the money to buy it so they just destroyed it.

Dunning: Did that happen in Richmond?

Ghio: No, it happened in San Francisco.

Dunning: Quite a bit would you say?

Ghio: After a while the government came in and they bought a lot of these boats and they shipped them to China, all over, to the Philippines, to fish over there.

Dunning: When would they do that?

Ghio: The government wanted thousands and thousands of boats during the war. They couldn't get them. There was no factories to manufacture them. So whatever boats there were that survived the government would come and estimate, "I'll give you so much. We want that boat." And the boat went away overseas. Ferry boats, anything. Fishing gear, everything.

Changes in the Fishing Industry: World War II Era

Dunning: I would like to ask you about how your industry changed because of World War II. That was in the middle of the sardine boom?

Ghio: Yes. World War II. All the fishermen had to stay home until they got investigated by the government, by the coast guard. They couldn't go fishing with their boats. We were all tied up for a month and a half. Then we all had to go to the coast guard and tell them we would like to go fishing.

He says, "Well, I want to see if you are American citizens." If you were an alien you went to the concentration camp. In order for us to work we all were hired to go to work for the government at the

Ghio: warehouse as stevedores until the government came and opened up permission for us to go back on our boats to go fishing.

Dunning: How long did that take?

Ghio: That took about two months. -

Dunning: So during that two months you were working--

Ghio: For the government.

Dunning: In what warehouse?

Ghio: We were unloading ships on the waterfront. Government-like say this is an army camp, then all the equipment had to go on a ship to go overseas. So we all worked there.

Dunning: Which part of the waterfront?

Ghio: Pier 45. On Fisherman's Wharf.

When the ship came in or the ship had to get loaded, well, we were there and working in the warehouse giving them the cargo to put on the ship bound for overseas. We had to do that for two months until the coast guard gave us permission to go back fishing. Our boats had to be registered that we were American citizens. then we could go out on the oceans to fish.

Dunning: There were such enormous changes on the Richmond waterfront during World War II.

Ghio: Yes. The Richmond waterfront, at that time there wasn't much business here. It was mostly barges handling the oil and gasoline.

Dunning: Then the Kaiser shipyard came.

Ghio: Yes, then the Kaiser shipyards went up, too. By that time we were shrimping.

Dunning: You were shrimping rather than sardining?

Ghio: Well, see during the war, we worked to catch the fish for the government. The government was buying the fish through the markets.

##

We worked for the government. After a while we were hired to go for sardines because that was the only thing that was open to make a living. Then we went purse seine fishing.

Dunning: Would you leave out of San Francisco?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: Okay. So you stopped docking over in Richmond during the war years? Is that true?

Ghio: We figured the big money was made in San Francisco so we stood in San Francisco during the war. After the war, then we came back to Richmond. Before we stood [stayed] in San Francisco, that's when the Kaiser came

Ghio: and took all the property and built shipyards. Then we had to get out of the shrimping business and go to work in San Francisco.

Dunning: Because you couldn't dock in your former location anyway because the shipyards were now there?

Ghio: Yes. And shipyards were going up so we just stood in San Francisco and fished for the government.

Dunning: Did you fish for the government during the whole war?

Ghio: Not the government. It's the fish company that was selling the fish to the government.

Dunning: I had heard that during those war years there was quite a bit of activity around Point San Pablo in terms of the sardine fisheries.

Brother: The canneries.

Dunning: Yes, the canneries. Were you connected with that at all?

Ghio: We were connected with that because when we went to San Francisco we were hired to go on these big purse seines to catch sardines and come up here and work. The money was to be made there. If you got on a good boat. After a while we stood [stayed] there for three, six months, then we went back on our own to go fishing.

Then there was so much activity going on in the bay that you couldn't keep up with it. The waterfront, they had FBIs running up and down the waterfront. If

Ghio: they saw you walking around the waterfront they said, "Show me your ID card or your identification and you can walk." If not, you had to get out and go across the street or you had to go uptown.

The government just stepped in and quarantined everything out. But we had permission because we had our papers, our pictures and everything that we were passable. Then we could go down the waterfront and go fishing and they wouldn't stop us.

Dunning: It seems like there must have been quite a bit of boat traffic at the time?

Ghio: Oh yes, lot of traffic. Lots of traffic.

Dunning: Was it more dangerous for you to go out fishing?

Ghio: It wasn't dangerous. You could say it was dangerous because the demand was right there to go out and catch a fish and come in, bring it in. In Richmond, there was the Standard Oil, that's all they were operating, just the Standard Oil. There wasn't much activity over here.

Dunning: Standard Oil and the Santa Fe.

Ghio: Standard Oil and the Santa Fe, that's all there was. All the activity was in San Francisco and Oakland.

Dunning: All the activity for the fishing?

Ghio: Yes. Up here we had Camp Stoneman in Pittsburg. There were fishermen in Pittsburg and then there was Camp Stoneman. While the boys all had their training we used to see them come down with the ferry boat to go on the ships and go overseas. Every month or so there was a group of soldiers going overseas. They were transferred from Pittsburg all the way down to San Francisco, and on the ship they went away. Everything was so fast, so much in a rush, that you couldn't keep up with the activities. It was so fast.

Dunning: Certainly Richmond changed like never before. The population went from 23,000 to 125,000.

Ghio: Yes. When the shipyards came, then everything changed because different people from the middle states came here to work in the shipyards and naturally the population just got bigger and bigger. Right here we were just a handful of people, the Simonis, the Portuguese and the Americans. It was a very nice place to live. Then when the war broke out, Kaiser hired I don't know how many thousands of people to come over here and put up a ship, to work in the shipyards.

Dunning: I know a lot of early residents I've talked to, they had the feeling that everybody was going to leave after the shipyards closed and they were going to have their small town again, and that didn't happen. A lot of people did go back to the South and Midwest, but then they would bring back their family.

Ghio: Well, they came without no shoes. They went back with shoes and bought their acres and acres of land. They worked in the shipyards and then they went back and

Ghio: bought their ranch, bought their acres of land and went back to their farming again.

Dunning: Except an awful lot of people then came back or stayed once they got the California life into them.

Ghio: Yes, they came here. Some stayed, but some went back and bought property because of the money they were making here. Probably you did three hours work in the whole week and you got a check of two hundred dollars. You had to wait for your turn to go to work if there was any.

Stories of Shipyard Accidents

Dunning: Were you ever tempted to get a job with the shipyards?

Ghio: We wanted no part of it because we had friends of ours that worked in the shipyards and they said, "It's big money, but there's a lot of risky work." You're working too fast. Everything had to be rushed fast.

When my father passed away we called emergency [ambulancel] to come over. They didn't come right away, so when he came about two hours later, he told us the story. He said, "We just came out of the shipyards and we had to haul five or six people out of the shipyards to bring them to emergency. That's how dangerous it is at the shipyards."

Then we had a friend of ours, he was working in the shipyards and the iron came down and crushed two of

Ghio: his feet. It took one year to fix one foot up and then it took him another year to fix the other foot up.

Then I had a brother-in-law. He worked for the shipyards. He fell down a ladder and he broke his spinal. He fell down a ladder. He was on the night shift. The day shift went up; and when they were handling the equipment the iron hit the ladder, but the inspector didn't check the ladder. Then when they went on the night shift, as he was working going up, the ladder cracked. Two guys went over the top. He was up way pretty near the top, say about twenty feet. The ladder cracked. He came down. He busted his spinal [spinel] in the shipyards.

Dunning: That's interesting because I bet most of the people that worked in the shipyards would never go out on the boat like you. They would consider that was too dangerous.

Ghio: The way they were making the boats they were glueing them together. They will say, "Well, the factory will make the bow, the other factory will make this."

Then they bring all the parts together, they weld them all together inside of one week. In one month that boat was ready to go out with a load of cargo. One trip only. Go out with a load and never come back. That's the way the government was working so fast to get the cargo overseas. And there was no ships around the bay. That's why the government was buying little boats, big boats, to try to get the cargo overseas.

Decision Not to Work in the Shipyards

Dunning: Did you make more money during the war because some of these subcontracts?

Ghio: I had the opportunity to make it but I said, "I'll work one year and then I'll take off six months, and then I'll go back again to work."

It didn't pay. I had friends of mine that worked night and day during the war. After two or three years they're in the cemetery. They're six feet underground for trying to be hoggish to kill themselves to make that money. They were working two shifts making money. But where is it going to get you? You just put yourself in the graveyard, that's all.

When I saw that I said, "To heck with that. I'll just work so much and then take it easy and then work again so much." There was a lot of work all over.

That's the way it was. I didn't want to work hard. I had an offer to work two jobs. The warehouse job, and then go stevedoring in the same building to help the stevedores to drive a jitney, to drive a forklift to lift up cargo.

The stevedores came and said, "Hey, do you want a job working with us? When you get through with this, you just punch the clock and go to work, go on a ship or work. Do you want to work?"

Ghio: I said, "Why? I've got to kill myself to work to be hoggish for the money? No way." I just did my eight hours and away I went home.

Dunning: Why do you think you're different? Because in this society money is emphasized so much, making money, but it didn't seem to influence you that much.

Ghio: No, because I was free. I wasn't married. I didn't have no family. I didn't have nothing to buy. I was free. I just worked so much. As long as I made my wages, and that's it. The other way if you had a family or something, well naturally you had to work hard. The wages were pretty good but it wasn't enough. Then the wages went sky high today.

Dunning: It seems like you chose a simpler life?

Ghio: Yes. That's why I'm here today. If I was working and killing myself and getting drunk like a lot of my buddies did, and having a good time, well what happens? They're not here. They're gone. They're in a cemetery. I'm still here. That was the wild life you got because the money was--

Sister: Okay, Dominic. So far so good.

Ghio: No, but that's the way it was.

Dunning: Well, I'm just about finished with this tape for today, but I would like to come back one more time and ask you about some of the different kinds of fish that you fished for. Today we went over some general areas,

Dunning: particularly the Depression, and World War II. Next time I want to ask you specifically about other marine species that were actually brought into this area.

Seafood:--From_Dog_Shark_to_Whale_Salami

Ghio: Well, I'm going to tell you. We ate ninety-five percent of the fish that were caught in the bay and out in the ocean. There was a variety of all kinds of fish. And we ate every one outside of one fish. It was what they call a dog shark.

Dunning: Dog shark?

Ghio: Yes, dog shark. In other words, it was like not a poison fish, but it was a shark that was a scavenger fish. It wasn't edible. But then all the rest, whatever you can imagine, we ate it all. We ate all three, four different kinds of shark. We ate salmon, sardines, anchovies, and squid, and mackerel, and tuna. You name it, we ate it. We ate them.

Brother: We ate whale, too, you know.

Ghio: We even ate the whales.

Dunning: Now that's a story I want to save for next time. The whale is too big a story to get into right now.

Ghio: But the whale, like I say, a friend of mine, he had a slaughterhouse. He was taking care of the whales. So they caught a young whale, say sixty, eighty feet. They got the back half of the meat of the whale, took

Ghio: it up to the butcher, and the butcher marinated it, fixed it all up, and then they ground it up and made salami. And we had salami.

Dunning: Whale salami?

Ghio: Yes. It was this big. It was just like ordinary Italian salami. The only thing, instead of being beef and pork, it was pork and the meat of the whale. It was just a little bit of a shade darker. It was delicious. We just ate it like it was salami.

Sister: And they're here.

Dunning: And you're still alive. [laughs] Well, thank you very much for today's session. I think we have quite enough for today.

Fishing:--A Seasonal Occupation

[Date of Interview: April 2, 1986]##

Dunning: I would like to ask you if there are particular years that have been best for you in your fishing career? When the fish were most abundant?

Ghio: That's a guess because today we're here, tomorrow we're there, and today we catch them and tomorrow we don't catch them. We tried all different trades, and you have seasonal trades.

In other words, say like next month we're going to go for salmon. Now you've got five months or six months of fishing for salmon. Then you got other trades. Shrimping, we liked it because it was easy work, we're our own boss, and we were home all day you could say. Go out fishing five hours of the day and then get your catch, come in, unload it, and then you were through for the day.

Dunning: Have there ever been periods where the fishing has been wonderful for a long period of time in the San Francisco Bay? Any that stand out in your mind?

Ghio: It's seasonal. But with the seasonal you had to work hard to make those two or three months in advance of work. In other words, if you averaged \$1,000 within those two or three months, then at the end of two or three months you would be working on something else and you make some more. At the end of the year it averaged from \$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000. It depends on what the value of the price on the merchandise is.

Dunning: Have there been years or seasons that have been really bad?

Ghio: Oh yes. What's really bad now is that we get these heavy rains like we had this year. When rains like this come down it vanishes everything in the bay and you have to wait until about April, May, and June before that water gets cleared and the merchandise comes right back in the bay. Then we work from then up to the winter. That gets about eight months out of the year of working.

Government Purchase of Fish During World War II

Ghio: During the war there was a lot of work all around, fishing for this, fishing for that, and you couldn't be in two trades at one time so you had to stay in one. So what we did--the government was buying a lot of fish--so we just dropped everything and we went to that trade. That starts off in January, February, March, April, say about six months. You work all week, five days a week. Then you work hard. You get what you can and the government was buying the fish. You sold everything you brought in.

Dunning: The fish that the government would buy, would they buy it from you directly or were you working for someone else?

Ghio: You worked for a market. At that time there were five, six big concerns that handled all the fish that were brought in.
##[tape interruption]

Food Supply for Internment Camps

Dunning: We were talking about the war years.

Ghio: Well, during the war there were concentration camps of the Japanese--

Dunning: Internment camps?

Ghio: Yes. Japanese, Italians, Swedish, German, whatever you had, and the government had to supply them with food. They told us fishermen to go out and catch the fish and then the government would buy it and take care of the concentration camps where they were living. They had to have food. That's the only thing. The government was buying a lot of fish. That kept us very busy for a period of two or three years.

Dunning: And were you able to make more money than usual?

Ghio: Yes, you make more money, but lots of work. It's practically twelve, fourteen hours of the day or night of working to catch this fish and come in, unload, and the government will buy it through the buyers, say wholesale houses. They buy everything at a low cost. Then they resell it to the government.

Dunning: What were you fishing for at that time?

Ghio: Smelt. Smelt is the fish that is in the bay all year round practically. At a certain time of the year they come in scarce, and then in the summer they multiply. We go out and we work. We were about seven, eight, ten boats working on one big bay area. The Fish and Game

Ghio: couldn't stop us because we were catching the fish for the government. The Fish and Game did not bother the fishermen at that time because everything that was caught was to take care of the population of the people needing food.

Department of Fish and Game Regulations

Dunning: Have there been times when the Fish and Game were kind of down your neck.

Brother: They want to know your license, that's all. Then they'll leave us alone for all year.

Ghio: That's what they want.

Dunning: You're showing me now a copy of your license?

Brother: Yes, this is our license.

Dunning: Do you have to have a license every year and you renew it once a year?

Ghio: Yes, once a year. It has to be ready by April first. After that you don't know when they'll come and check you over. We have to go down to Fish and Game this week and get this, the boat registration, and then we also get what they call the rules and regulation of what we are supposed to do of the year of fishing. If we don't know, they will explain it to us and tell us, "This is the way the by-laws are for you to go fishing for the year."

Dunning: Could you give me an example of some of those by-laws?

Brother: Don't go in restricted areas.

Ghio: They have restricted areas, and then you're supposed to bring in a certain amount of size or weight of fish. You cannot peddle them unless there is a wholesale buyer there. He has to have the wholesale license. You just bring it to him. Then he takes care from there on what the Fish and Game pay on the tariff tax, which runs about a cent and a half per pound that was caught. That's for all the boats in the Bay Area.

Dunning: So you wouldn't be able to sell directly unless you had a peddler's license?

Ghio: Unless I got a peddler's license from the Fish and Game.

Dunning: Have you ever had that?

Ghio: Yes. We had it for over twenty-five years. That costs us forty dollars, fifty dollars a year. It depends on which way you want it. You can get the peddling but you can't get the license to go into large quantities because the price of that goes up to \$150 to \$200. Say you wanted to put up a cannery. It's in another category.

Dunning: Why did you drop your peddler's license?

Ghio: Because we retired and we ain't going to do that game no more. We retired. We had customers from here to Antioch buying our merchandise like shrimp for bait use

Ghio: only. We had to have the wholesaler's license with us in case the game warden in Sacramento or Antioch should look at us and say, "You got your wholesale license?"

We present that and then she says, "It's okay. Carry on. Do what you're doing."

Every month we have to make a statement, send it in to Fish and Game, and pay them one cent or a cent and a half per pound for the amount of catch.

Dunning: How much cheating is there among fishermen?

Ghio: Well, we figure--

Dunning: You're not going to go to jail for anything you tell them?

Brother: No, no.

Ghio: No. See, you have a loss in it, so we allow our loss within the week. Say we brought in five hundred pounds of fish for the week and we sold them. There's a percentage of that which is lost, of dead shrimp and the customers don't want them. We have to deduct that from the five hundred and just estimate say three hundred for the month.

But if you wholesale to the buyers, they have to buy them, and they take the loss. Because we bring them in fresh alive to them. Then if they spoil in their hands in their part of the business, that's their doing. We haven't got nothing to do with that.

Dunning: That's their problem?

Ghio: Yes. And with fish it runs the same way. You bring in your fish fresh caught to the wholesale house. It's up to him to get rid of it and sell it within the three or four days of the week.

Dunning: Do you pack your fish in ice?

Ghio: No. It's a matter of two or three hours difference of catching them and to get in to get unloaded. That's all it is. It doesn't pay to put ice on the boat. But if you go out on the ocean and your boat is capable to carry ice, then you have to ice the fish because you stay two, three days out there fishing. Then you come in with your catch. But as far as in the Bay Area or local we would just go out and within two or three hours your fish is sold to the wholesale house.

More on the Sardine Boom

Dunning: I would like to hear about the sardine boom. We talked about it a bit the last time, but I would like to get a sense of what Point San Pablo and that whole area looked like. At the time of the sardine boom I heard that a lot of the shrimp camps were reactivated and it was quite a busy place.

Ghio: I can't tell you the year, but there was so much sardines out in the oceans--it was before 1942.

Dunning: I've heard that the sardine boom began around the mid-thirties and lasted until the late 1940s.

Brother: The late forties, yes.

Ghio: All right. In the thirties there was a lot of fish out in the ocean. Monterey had from fifty to a hundred boats fishing for sardines. They had canneries to pack them and to put them in cans. The rest of the fish was used to make fertilizer and to get the oil out of it. Then they sold that to foreign countries.

San Francisco had one or two canneries. Then when the other cannery people saw that there was a big sardine industry going on, fishermen wanted to go and get a bigger boat to go catch a lot of fish. They had to build up canneries all around the bay. The first cannery was F. E. Boot, Incorporated. They had a barge picking up the fish.

They had the cannery up in Pittsburg, and also in Martinez. Now, they had orders from foreign countries to go ahead and go through the process. But the other fishermen within six months saw that there were big doings, big good money, so they all bought bigger boats and the canneries had to go up.

In Point San Pablo, to build the canneries up fast, they used to buy an old ship and convert it into a cannery. Not for packing or for eating; just to make fertilizer and oil.

In the meanwhile they were putting up these big buildings and putting up the canneries for purposes of oil and fertilizer. About six or seven canneries went up at Point San Pablo. They started manufacturing all the sardines that the boats would bring in.

Ghio: In Monterey there was one hundred and fifty. In San Pedro there was close to a hundred boats. There were boats up north, Oregon and Washington. When it came to the season of sardines, from Monterey to San Francisco, the boats all piled up in San Francisco. That brought an average of four or five hundred boats. The season was open about six months and there was about five months of good fishing for the boats to go out and catch the fish.

Dunning: Which months?

Ghio: That would be August, September, October, November. Then December and January it dropped off and that was the close of the season. Then it opened up again the following year in the month of August. It put a lot of people to work. Each boat carried twelve men to operate the boat, to go out and catch the fish and bring it in. Then the canneries, they multiplied, say a hundred, two hundred people to work at the cannery to do the process. So it put a lot of people to work.

Dunning: Were you working in that at all?

Ghio: Yes, we worked. I was hired to go out on a purse seiner. We called it a purse seiner as a working man on a boat. We were averaging say one dollar per tonnage that we catch. If we caught fifty tons we would make fifty dollars for that day. If the boat gets a hundred tons and we could carry them, we would make one hundred dollars.

Dunning: You mean your boat would make one hundred dollars or each person working on the boat would get that?

Ghio: Each person working on this boat here. The owner of the boat, he's got to guarantee that the motor is in good shape, that we don't lose any days, and the net has got to be fairly good and strong to do the season. Then it's up to him. If he's a good skipper he will catch the fish for us and we will do the work and work back and forth--

Dunning: Would you as an individual make fifty dollars?

Ghio: Yes, individually.

Dunning: As an individual if the boat caught that much?

Ghio: Yes. In other words, if the boat caught a hundred tons twelve men will get one dollar per tonnage. The boat owner, he gets five shares to the net and five shares to the boat. In other words, he gets about twelve shares all together plus twelve of the working men. Then he divides everything up. In other words, he's got to supply us with--the food we pay for, and the fuel we have to pay for. Then the rest is up to the boss, that he's got the boat and we work for him.

No_Sardine_Fishing_During_the_Full_Moon

Dunning: Would you go out mostly on day trips?

Brother: Night.

Ghio: Night and day.

Brother: All night work, all night.

Ghio: See, you got four weeks in the month. You got one week of full moon. Full moon is seven days that we do not go out.

Dunning: Why?

Ghio: Because the fish are there but you can't catch them. On account of the moon it shows the light and the fish sort of disappears. So we stay home that one week. In the meanwhile we help the boss to take care of the boat and the net and the motors, whatever we have to. Then when the full moon passes three weeks straight through without stopping outside of Saturday or Sunday, or a holiday we would just work right through.

Techniques for Catching Sardines

Dunning: What time would you go out? At night?

Ghio: We would go out in the afternoon at three o'clock. We would show up the next morning with the catch.

Dunning: So you would fish all night long?

Ghio: We would fish all night long and we would run different parts of the coast. Say today, we prospect up here in Point Reyes or Bodega. The next night we'll prospect around the Farallones. The next night we'll go down to Half Moon Bay. The next night we go to Monterey. We prospect, and wherever the fish are, all the boats will accumulate.

Brother: All night time work.

Ghio: All night work. When there's fish, it's a big, big light about a city block long. It shines like the moon. All the boats will go upon that school of fish and get a portion of it. You might get a portion of a hundred tons. The next boat comes and he gets a portion of seventy-five tons. The next one gets another portion. We're all together trying to catch all the fish in it. One boat cannot carry the amount of fish there was.

Dunning: Would you go in a line, or would you--?

Ghio: No, we would just scatter out.

Dunning: All towards that one school of fish?

Ghio: One school of fish.

Brother: You got to go slow so you don't scatter them too much.

Ghio: You have to go slow and approach them.

Brother: Everything's dark. No lights, nothing.

Ghio: No lights or nothing, not even a cigarette. If you were smoking a cigarette you had to throw it away because you had to get on that school of fish and get your portion.

Dunning: Would there be much competition for spots among the fishermen?

Ghio: Well, there's no competition. Say this is the school of fish. I come and he comes and we all get a portion. Say I catch this corner. Then I'm going to put my net right here and catch that. He comes, he sees this corner, he'll put his net right there. The next one will come and put his net. We have to do it quickly before the fish get scared and then they go down. Then we don't catch them. It takes only one big light to go up at night on the school of fish and that fish is gone.

Dunning: Has that happened where inexperienced fishermen did that?

Ghio: Yes.

Brother: You have to make a circle this--

Ghio: A circle like this table. That's what they call a half rig.

Types_of_Sardine_Nets

Dunning: What kind of net were you using?

Ghio: It was a purse seine ring net, made of cotton, an inch and a quarter mesh. The net was so cheap that you buy it at seventy-five cents, fifty cents a pound. You buy bales of it. Bales run five hundred pounds to a bale, about as big as this table, that high. Then we have to get the net and tar it, put it out in a field to dry, pick it all up, then get close to the waterfront where the boat is, stretch it out, and then start putting all

Ghio: the net together. We used about eight to ten bales of net like that. That would be about seven, eight tons of netting.

Dunning: In one big net? That's what you would put out?

Ghio: One big net, yes.

Dunning: How would you handle it?

Ghio: That's why there were twelve people at a time. Twelve people, we would get in line. You would know how to weave net, sew net, you would get the important job to do that. We tried to get the net done within seven or eight days it takes to put a net together. The fellow that's in charge of putting the net together, he's got to concentrate that he doesn't make a mistake. If he makes a mistake we will not catch any fish at all.

Dunning: What would a mistake be?

Ghio: Well, he may not measure the net out the right way. It goes by fathoms because you have to make the net at least three, four hundred fathoms long.

Dunning: Three hundred fathoms, what would that be equivalent to in terms of feet? Can you give me any idea?

Ghio: Six feet make a fathom.

Dunning: Okay. So three hundred fathoms would be about eighteen hundred feet?

Ghio: Yes. We had to put a cork line, lead line, one strip of net here and another strip of net here, another strip of net there. It comes to about forty to fifty fathoms deep when we get through. That's how deep that net goes in the ocean to catch the fish. In other words when it goes in the ocean, it makes a big circle, and everything drops down. You've got over three to four tons of lead on there for that net to sink down in the water fast.

Dunning: That is like the anchor?

Ghio: No, it's not anchor. It is lead woven into a rope. When that net goes out that lead line, that rope, goes down in the water very fast. Then you pick that all up at one time and put it over your head and you make sure everything is secure because that's five or six tons of lead over your head. Then you let it on the deck and your fish are all swimming around. In other words you purse it all up into one lump and put it on the boat. The cork line and the rest of the netting is there for the fish to stay alive until we can get the net and put the fish in the boat.

Dunning: Would the twelve men actually bring the net up or did you have any equipment?

Brother: We had a winch to pull it up.

Ghio: Yes, there's the mechanic, he takes care of the winch. He does all the winch work. Two fellows take care of tying up the net to lift it up in the air. The other seven to eight fellows have to get the net and stack it

Ghio: in rotation for the next set. Say when we get through--within three to four hours--the net is ready to look again for some more fish if we haven't got enough.

Dunning: Another set?

Ghio: To make another set. Sometimes they average two sets a night. It takes about four hours to get one set on the boat. If you catch all your fish in one set, then you're through. You put your fish on the boat, you come on in. You have your dinner, you have your breakfast, you have anything you want.

Brother: On the way home.

Meals on Board the Sardine Boats

Ghio: On the way home. The cook, he cooks up a meal.

Dunning: So you always had a cook on the sardine boat?

Ghio: Yes, there's a cook on the boat. He cooks three meals a day for you. He makes sure the boat is supplied with food for two or three days. When we come in and he sees he's short of food he calls up the grocery store and they deliver some more food. Sometimes you go out and you stay one or two days and you've got the food.

Dunning: Were there times when there was an especially good cook or an especially bad cook?

Ghio: No. Each race had their people to cook for them. The Italians had their people to cook their way, the Norwegian had their people to cook. The Japanese had their cooks to cook. There were Japanese fishermen, too, fishing for sardines. Each one had their cooking on the boat.

Dunning: So you had your Italian cook on the boat?

Ghio: Oh yes, we had it.

Dunning: Did you eat pretty well?

Ghio: Oh yes. We had everything from soup to nuts. It was a must to have the food on the boat. Because if the boat didn't have food, I will not go fishing. I'll go on a hunger strike [laughs].

Dunning: What about drinking? Was that allowed?

Ghio: No liquor on the boat.

Dunning: Really?

Ghio: No liquor unless--the skipper's got liquor but he's got it locked up and we can't touch it. We don't want beer on the boat. Coffee, milk, soda pop, all that you can have. Because if there's alcohol on the boat they could drink, overdo, and then we have arguments and fights. This way here the skipper controls that himself.

Dunning: Does that mean the skipper can drink what he wants?

Ghio: No, he's got to play ball with us. If we can't drink, he cannot drink.

Dunning: Why does he have it on board then?

Ghio: Well, sometimes say we're happy, we made a good catch, so the skipper will say, "Here's a bottle of whiskey, boys. Drink. We're going home with a good catch and we're all tickled pink."

But then he takes it off the table and if he catches anybody drinking on the boat he can fire them right there.

Trusting Fellow Fishermen

Ghio: Another thing, we had to trust each other on the boat. We all have our wallets. We all have money in our pocket. The first one that does any stealing on the boat, he gets fired right there and then right off the boat.

Dunning: Did you see that happen?

Ghio: Well, if a stranger comes on the boat that we don't like or he had to work with us, then we keep an eye on him, but amongst ourselves we trusted one another with our purse on the boat. That's the main thing is to trust one another. Because I have a value in my purse, you have, he has, and we can say, "Well, I laid my purse there on my bunk where I sleep. Somebody went in there and stole my money." That you cannot have on the boat.

Ghio: The skipper looks out for that. If he catches anybody stealing something on the boat you're fired, you're off the boat. Then they spread the word to the other boats that you will not be hired on any boat to go fishing.

Dunning: So a person would get blacklisted?

Ghio: Yes. Like say we go to a different port and we hire a fellow that understands all about the fishing. Well, he comes on the boat for a week with us to teach us or to show us something. Then we all keep an eye on him, make sure he don't touch anything that don't belong to him.

##

Ghio: See, the mechanic, he's on the job forty-eight hours around the clock. In other words, while we're sleeping he's watching out for his motor. That motor has got to run steady night and day. Then we give him a break. When he is tired or he has to go to sleep he takes his two or three hours nap and then we take care of his part of the job. When he wakes up, then he has his breakfast, and he's back there on his job. If we stay up forty-eight hours, he's got to stay up forty-eight hours, too.

It's tiresome, but he's responsible for twelve men on the boat, and he's got a boat that's got a value of \$60,000, \$70,000. He's got to make sure he has a good catch to show that he's a good skipper and a good boatman, and that if you work for him you make wages.

Dunning: Was there ever any piracy in terms of other boats coming in and stealing your catch?

Ghio: No, no. There was no such thing like that. Even though you came in port and tied up at the wharf, that's all you saw, is your working people, or fishermen, walking around. But we never did try to steal anything from another fisherman.

Dunning: And no fisherman ever tried to steal from you?

Ghio: No. The only thing, well, it's jealousy. We could say that I'm on a school of fish and I'm hesitating and I want to see the fish work right because when I make the set I want to see everything come out right. Another boat could come up and see that you're hesitating. If you don't watch him he'll probably start making a set around that fish and take it away from you. Then you have jealousy and arguments right there.

Theft of Crab Pots

Ghio: The only thing they steal after is from the crab fishermen. Crab fishermen, at one time, had what they call a ring net. They had about twenty-two ring nets on a boat. They go out in the morning, they do their catching, pick up their crabs, pick up their ring nets, and come home by three o'clock. Everybody was out, in and out.

Then the fishermen didn't like the way they were crabbing so they invented what they call crab pots. It's a pot that at one time was valued at seventy-five

Ghio: dollars. Now they're valued at one hundred and fifty dollars. You got a hundred, two hundred of those layed out in the ocean. You have your fingers crossed that the next day you go out there you see if your gear is still there. If it's still there then you're safe.

If not, somebody during the night passed by, a ship or something, ran over them, destroyed the buoys, and down they sink. Or somebody will come, pick them up, steal them, and go away with them. That's what I call piracy and stealing somebody else's equipment. That's been going on since they invented these pots, what we call crab pots.

Dunning: What do the crab pots look like?

Ghio: It's a square screen, iron, and the crabs will crawl in there and then they're trapped. They can't come out. They can crawl in but they can't come out. They call them pots.

Dunning: Do they rest on the bottom?

Ghio: They rest on the bottom of the bay, of the ocean, and they stay out there night and day. You go out every day or every other day where you have them and see if they're still there. If they're not there you just keep your fingers crossed. Maybe a ship ran over them, destroyed the buoys, or somebody passing by saw them, picked some up and took them away.

Dunning: Here's your brother coming in with a net. What is this?

Ghio: That's a crab net from the 1920s. That's the way the crab nets were. We were five hundred boats. Each one had twenty-four of these on their boats. When they got through with the day these nets came home with them plus the crabs they caught, say three dozen, five dozen, ten dozen of crabs.

Dunning: This looks like it belongs in a museum. I'll take a picture of that later.

Ghio: Now the trap, what we call a crab trap.

Dunning: It looks like a basketball hoop, a big one.

Ghio: A crab trap is a ring like this and a ring on the bottom, but it's all wire net. Then the crabs will crawl in and get trapped and can't get out. Now these here, it will cost a fisherman maybe a dollar and a half. The blacksmith makes a thousand of these--

Dunning: Of the hoops?

Ghio: Yes. He sells it to the fishermen at a dollar a piece. The fisherman, one crab net might cost him maybe ten dollars when he gets through, to finish, to go to work. That's at that time. But today to build a crab pot you have to get a man that knows how to wire up the pot. The welders have got to make those good and strong. There's buoys and there's ropes you have to buy. It all accumulates to about \$100 and \$150 apiece.

Dunning: So if someone steals it that's a big loss.

Ghio: Yes, you're out. You're off. You have your loss. I talked to one fellow. He bought a home in Point Richmond. He's got a big boat and he's got two hundred traps. He lost over thirty-five traps this year. So what he made on the crab value, maybe he broke even for the season because the crab traps were stolen or they were lost. Some years you get a good year, you make good money. Say you could average \$20,000, \$30,000. And some years if you have a loss, you lose.

Brother: This is the big trap.

Ghio: See, that's the cup. You put the bait in here.

Dunning: What would you use for bait?

Ghio: Sardines, any kind of stale fish. This is all made by hand. Look at it. That's all made by hand.

Dunning: Would the blacksmith make this?

Ghio: No. The fishermen themselves.

Dunning: You would have to make that?

Ghio: Yes. You buy the wire and in a day you might make four or five of these. Tomorrow I'll make three more.

This is what they call a cup, and that's a big cup. This is all made by hand. Then they have them galvanized so the rust doesn't eat them. These here, for maybe two dollars or three dollars you buy a big

Ghio: spool of wire and then you stay there and you make it yourself. They make them in all different sizes. Big sizes, little sizes, it depends.

Dunning: You do that in your spare time?

Ghio: Yes. You do that all when you're off season.

Brother: We would five days a week. And Sundays you would be mending nets and do what you have to do to get ready for Monday and go out again. You only go out five days a week.

Ghio: Yes. The crab season is closed in July for four months because the female crabs have to shed their eggs and they don't want anybody to go fishing for crabs for about three months out of the year, four months. They have a certain time of the year when the crabs will shed their eggs and they want them to make the crabs grow. They're this big. Inside of a year they get that big. In two years they get bigger. It goes all the way up to seven inches across the back to measure a full crab. Beyond that they can go as far as seven, eight inches in measure.

End_of_Sardines:--Effects_of_Japanese_Current

Dunning: In your opinion, why do you think the sardines left? What happened?

Brother: On account of the war. [World War II]

Ghio: There was the war, and besides, what we call a Japanese current out in the ocean.

Dunning: Japanese current?

Ghio: Current. It comes from the north. The north current and the south current, they meet together at a distance of twenty-five miles out in the ocean. The currents pull either south or north. They will not bring the fish in close to the shore. They'll just keep them out all the time. Then we're closed for five, six, ten years, and the current has changed and comes back in close to the coast route where the fish will come in and spawn.

During the war they had a boat specialized with all the electric equipment to go out and see why the sardines had disappeared. They got as far as twenty-five miles out and they didn't see anything. As they were going out farther the current was pulling north and all the fish went that way towards Japan, all through there. Now it's turning around, coming from the south. It's coming back in again.

Dunning: Are you predicting another sardine boom?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: When?

Ghio: It's right now, today. The sardines aren't in the ocean where fishermen can make a living, but at one time we are three hundred, five hundred boats. Now we have one thousand five hundred boats. So the Fish and

Ghio: Game and the government do not want to destroy the sardines. If all these boats get ambitious to go catch the sardines they will wipe them out. They will be destroyed.

Dunning: How much do you think overfishing has influenced the sardine fishing?

Ghio: What do you mean?

Dunning: Do you think that's a problem? So many people are out there fishing that it diminished the supply?

Ghio: You see, canning and cannery, that was all right because the fish went in as food to eat. But when you catch the fish and you just boil it and take the oil out of it and make fertilizer, what does the oil going to do to the human being? Nothing. They use that for paint mix. They use them for all different things.

The fish, after it was cooked and turned into a pulp, it only goes for chicken feed. Chickens feed on that and they also make fertilizer for plants, you see. That's why they don't want the fish to be destroyed for that purpose, because there's other methods of making fertilizer and oil of different ways.

Personal Opinion on Whales

Ghio: Whaling was the same thing. So many whales. The boats used to average two hundred, three hundred whales a year, caught, brought in. What they did with it, they saved the meat for feeding the animals like cats and

Ghio: dogs. The oil went in for different processes of painting and things like that. All the rest of it went in as fertilizer and chicken feed.

Now we here in the United States do not like to see the whales destroyed, but the other countries, they can go out and catch them and destroy them. England, Japan, Russia, they can go catch the whales because they're over two hundred miles out in the ocean. If they catch them that's their doing. But the United States doesn't want to destroy them no more.

Dunning: Do you agree with the legislation in '72 that closed the whale station?

Ghio: Well, the people don't like to see them destroyed, but a certain portion has to be destroyed. Now the whales on the Pacific Coast have not been destroyed for a period of over ten years. These whales go north to spawn and they go south to spawn. They work themselves up and down the coast.

They're useless fish. A whale is useless. That whale is not doing nobody no good. It's just swimming up and down.

Sea Lions:--Obstacle for Fishermen

Ghio: Our next problem is the sea lions. Sea lions, they are a menace for the fishermen because they come and they destroy the fish. If you're there trying to catch the fish you might have twenty-five, fifty sea lions destroying the fish so that we cannot catch them.

Ghio: But the people do not want the fishermen or the government destroying the sea lions. They want to keep them alive up and down the coast. So the fishermen are mad about that. They should be destroyed so we can have more fish to catch and better fishing. Right now if you go and throw a rock at a sea lion the game warden catches you and you have a fine of fifty dollars. The sea lions are around the beaches mating this time of year and have the young pups. They multiply, keep multiplying all year round. But they won't destroy them.

Dunning: And you disagree with that?

Ghio: I disagree with that because then the fishermen, when they go out, if there's a school of fish, there will be maybe twenty-five, thirty sea lions just come in there and scare all the fish away and destroy them, you see.

Now if you read the paper, I think it's England or Norway, some foreign country. They raise the young sea lions. When they come to a pup they go there and they kill them to get the furs off them. Now that's destroying them, but that's their country, that's their doing. The United States does not allow that.

They do that because they have to make a living. In the northern part of their country, they raise these sea lions from small pups, and as they grow bigger they know the certain time of the year and then they go and destroy them to get the furs off of them to make fur coats and different things.

Dunning: Are there any other examples of regulations that you think have made your career more difficult?

Ghio: No. It's the weather and the nature. If we have a good summer we're fine. Sometimes we have a bad winter and we're out of commission for about two or three weeks until we do something else.

Changes in San Francisco Bay

Dunning: I would like to ask you about some of the biggest changes that you have seen in the bay during your career.

Ghio: Well, when was it? When they put up the first dam up near Sacramento. All this rain all year round used to wash out the river. It flushes out all the chemicals, all the pollution.

It used to wash it all out in the bay. But then when they started building the first dam, they held all this water back so the percentage of the salt water coming in the bay was higher and less sweet water was going out to flush it all out. Way back, there was ninety-five percent sweet and salt water all the way up to Antioch. It was blending, and the fish came in to spawn their eggs and raise their little fishes and then swim out and come back, in and out.

But when they put up the dam, there was no more sweet water coming down and it was a higher percentage of salt water coming in and the fish didn't come into the bay to spawn. That hurt our fishing very much.

Ghio: Like this time of the year [spring] we would be getting the first run of shrimping coming in. Then we have shrimp all the way through for the year, there was an average of a thousand pounds to fifteen hundred pounds per boat per day. Now they disappear and they don't accumulate. They don't multiply because no sweet water is coming down for them to spawn.

Dunning: Yes, I read that six thousand miles of rivers and creeks that were once suitable for spawning have been reduced to three hundred miles through the inland waterway modification, dams etc.

Ghio: Yes. And this year we had a few floods up in the Delta that they had to release all the snow water out because there was a little bit too much. They couldn't handle it. By doing this they just washed everything that's on the bottom of the bay out in the ocean until the water stops going on, and then they work themselves right back in the bay again. All different kinds of fish.

Dunning: Do you ever see that as being reversed? Do you think the fish will adapt to that?

Ghio: The fish want it so they can raise the young fish by coming in the bay and spawning and then work themselves out again. See, it's the salt water that is too salty and the fish out in the ocean cannot come in the bay because--they come in the bay, but they can't spawn because there's no sweet water to mix. You have to have sweet water to mix.

Dunning: Do you see any hope for that situation or is that a permanent change?

Ghio: That's completely changed right along, so I would say-- when did we have good fishing? About ten years ago?

Brother: Yes, ten, eleven years.

Ghio: Yes. After that, other fishermen came in the game and they start fishing. Instead of relaxing the water, say fish twelve hours of the day, they fish now day and night because the amount of shrimp there is scarce. The bait shops want shrimp for bait, and the fishermen work night and day, which they shouldn't be. They should work twelve hours of the day and then stay in twelve hours. Instead, these boats, they go out now. They work night and day.

In our times, we only used to work ten, twelve hours of the day and then the rest of the day we had it for ourselves to relax and let the fish accumulate and multiply itself. But now today it's just all the way around. They just work night and day. Our salmon boats are doing the same thing. They're working night and day. If they can catch salmon at nighttime they would be working night and day. There's too many boats, and they all want to see if they can make big money, big catches.

Pollution in the Bay

Dunning: How do you think pollution in the bay has affected the fishing?

Ghio: It's the population. The population of the people got so much that Standard Oil and all the oil companies, they had to release all this--I can't say the name--toxicated--

Dunning: Toxins?

Ghio: Yes, all that. They got no way to release it. If they put it in the bay, then the people that see that, they will say, "Poison in the bay." See?

They don't have any way to destroy that. In the 1930s, they used to put this gas, poison, in drums and then take it out in the ocean, out to the Farallones, and bury it out there. But now people today, they say, "Well, that's a menace what they are doing." Those barrels might break in time to come.

All that gas will come up. Then it will kill all the ocean, kill all the fish out in the ocean, which it can't because the ocean's got so much water, you cannot destroy it. So now they put it in drums. Then they try and bury it in some out of town lot or canyon. They try and bury it. They've got no way to destroy it.

Dunning: That's probably why we're all drinking bottled water. We're afraid it's going to come up.

Ghio: Yes. The population got big and the industry is all by the water now. What chemicals they send out in the bay will hurt, affect the water.

Dunning: Have you noticed a difference in the taste of the fish? I have heard some examples where, if they cut open the fish, there would be toxins that they could actually see and smell.

Ghio: Yes. Well, say--I don't want to mention names--but oil companies, when they let the water out, the excess water, the fish used to live there, grow. But when you catch the fish and take it home to cook it, it had a taste of oil. It was so strong that you couldn't eat the fish. But if you go twenty-five miles away from there and catch the same fish someplace else the fish is sweet and delicious. You could eat it all day. So it just shows you that the companies are releasing that water and the fish that grow along the cove there, or beach, will eat some of it and get sick.

Dunning: Have there been examples of fishermen getting together and complaining to the oil company?

Ghio: Yes, there were complaints from fishermen, but we were so small that the amount of money we were valued didn't mean nothing. The big companies had twice as much strength, lawyers, and everything, that they can buck you and say, "That's it. You cannot fight us at all. What we do is our business." Until the government steps in. Then they'll do it.

Dunning: So your alternative was just to go out twenty-five miles or further?

Ghio: Go out further and try to get better fish and come in.

Dunning: When I see people fishing off the piers and close to shore in Richmond, I just wonder about how healthy those fish are.

Ghio: Well, the fish are not healthy. You see now, these people that fish off the bank, they can't afford to go on a boat to fish. They can't buy a boat. They try to fish off the bank and fish that way, which is nice. It's an outing for them. Now we got Point Pinole, there's a public dock. Berkeley has a public dock for fishing. And they got a club across the bay in San Rafael that you can fish off of.

Dunning: The Marin Rod and Gun Club?

Ghio: Yes. Well--

Dunning: Is that right at the base of the Richmond-San Rafael bridge?

Ghio: Yes, right on the north side of the bridge. See, that pier there used to be the drinking water for San Rafael, Mendocino County, all over there. We had barges going up the Delta full up with water, bring it down and go there, and pump it into San Rafael reservoir to make drinking water. That was many, many years ago.

Now they don't do it anymore because in each place the population of people came and they figured out how to get the water and put up a dam or get the river water and purify it and use it for drinking and cooking. Before, the only place they could get water

Ghio: was from these barges going up there loaded up with bay water, ocean water, and bringing it down here. Then they supplied the people with water.

This was all cattle ranch. Now it's all population of the people. Now the cattle, they moved them up in Santa Rosa. They're moving them way up towards the mountains. No more cattle.

Effects of Bay Area Bridges on Fishing

Dunning: How do you think the filling of land, particularly tideland beds, have affected fishing?

Brother: The bridge is one thing. The bridges in the bay, that's one thing.

##

Ghio: My brother knows every square inch of the bay. There were no bridges, no Golden Gate, no San Francisco Bay Bridge. There was no Richmond Bridge. There was nothing but plain ocean current coming in the bay. It brought in all kinds of fish and scattered them out to all different parts of the bay.

When they started building Treasure Island, that's number one. The land that they made, which was a mile or two miles square land they made. The current that came in from the ocean was twisted. It had to pull a different way. The current used to come in the bay.

Ghio: It used to come straight in to Berkeley Flats, we called it. Then all the fish would scatter out north and south and there was fish all over.

But when they built Treasure Island it made a different current. And the current was so strong that it used to average between seven and eight mile current. That's how strong it used to come in and that's how strong it went out. Then, when they started building the Golden Gate Bridge it broke the current of the swift current that was going in and the swift current that was going out. It broke it down to about half.

They built the Richmond Bridge. It's like a fence across the bay. The current that used to come in, it got so weak beyond the bridge that the fish couldn't come up to go to San Pablo Bay. It just blocked the current right down. In my brother's time we used to fish. You know the East Bay Highway in Berkeley? We used to fish beyond that before they built the highway.

Dunning: The East Bay Highway? Do you mean the old one, Shoreline?

Ghio: The Shoreline, like say down to the San Francisco Bay Bridge all the way up. Well, we used to fish all along there and beyond that. There was no freeway. It was all water that came in. It went all the way up to the canneries. There were three or four canneries, there were laboratories, there was a paint factory, there was everything, even the slaughterhouse where they killed the animals.

Ghio: Well, the water came all the way up to their property line. Then, when they started building the bridge they had to make freeways. When they stopped putting up the bridge they had to make a freeway so they started filling it all up with land. That wrecked our fishing because we used to go in there, catch our fish, catch our shrimp, and then go home.

The old freeway was San Pablo [Avenue]. The new freeway, they call it East Bay Freeway. Well, that's all filled in. The trains used to go down there. They had four or five tracks of trains. What the racetrack was, there used to be coves there and we used to call it stew bum camp. Stew bum was indicating that the hobos, when they got off the train they stopped there.

Dunning: Oh, stew bum?

Ghio: Yes. They used to jump off the train, go there, and they used to put up their little camps and make whatever they could make, a pot of stew or coffee, and they stayed there for two or three days.

Dunning: What decade are we talking about?

Ghio: 1925.

Dunning: Okay, so this is in your older brother's time?

Ghio: Yes. 1925. It was my time, too. They used to stay there two or three days, and they said, "Well, I'm going down south." So they waited for the next freight train that comes by. They hop on that and they keep going. At night time it looked so pretty when you

Ghio: passed by it on the boat. You could see all these guys had their little fire going to keep warm. It was out of the city limits and the cops couldn't do nothing to them.

There was no Berkeley Pier. Berkeley Pier was only a hundred feet long and it was only an industrial pier to unload barges. They used to unload their cargo there and that's it.

When they started building the ferry boats, then they started making the piers a little bit longer and longer. Then it went way out to about two miles. The ferry boats used to carry the people back and forth to San Francisco, to Berkeley, back and forth. In 1928, when they had a football game in Berkeley, you had to wait twenty-four hours to transfer from San Francisco to get to Berkeley to go see the football game.

Dunning: You had to really be a fan.

Ghio: The ferry building was busy carrying people back and forth to Oakland. Then around San Francisco on Fisherman's Wharf they had another two piers that they were using for the Berkeley transportation, back and forth. It was tremendous how the people would travel in those days.

Changes in the Richmond Waterfront

Dunning: Well, you've told me some of the changes in the Berkeley waterfront. What are some of the biggest changes you've seen specifically along the Richmond waterfront?

Ghio: On the Richmond waterfront we had porpoise, we had anchovies, we had good, rich salt water coming in from the ocean, and a lot of fish. It was like a spawning ground--Southhampton Shoals. It was beautiful. I mean, there was everything. Then we had transportation. They opened up the channel for the ships to go into the estuary to get unloaded with oil and things like that. That was a change there.

The Ford plant had its own ship coming in and unloading parts of the cars to manufacture them over here. That boat used to come in every three months. It used to make a trip to Detroit, pick up all the cars in parts, bring them over here, then they would make the cars in Richmond. After a while the city raised the taxes so they had to move out.

Then there was one big laboratory there. It used to hire quite a few people. Standard Oil was a big concern to hiring a lot of people.

The Parr Family on the Waterfront

Dunning: Were you ever familiar with Fred Parr or his nephew, John Parr Cox?

Brother: Oh yes, We know them.

Dunning: What do you know about them?

Ghio: Who?

Brother: Parr, Fred Parr.

Dunning: Fred Parr. The Parr family that really controlled the Richmond waterfront.

Ghio: My brother has worked for them and they were really rich people. They had property in Richmond. They had property in Oakland. They had property in Moss Landing. That's down in Monterey. They had property in South America. They had piers all over where the cargo used to come in and out. They had the original pictures of the canneries and the way that San Francisco Bay was. But I don't know if part of the family is still living.

Dunning: Actually, the nephew, John Parr Cox, is still living.

Ghio: They built an office on Hoffman Boulevard. I don't know if they still have it.

Dunning: They're over on Sutter Street in San Francisco now.

Ghio: Now they're on Sutter. But before for the East Bay they used to have the office there on Hoffman Boulevard. First it was on Point San Pablo. Then the pier got rotten, decayed, so they put an office up on Hoffman Boulevard, which you see as you go down like if you were going to Harbour Way.

Where the cargo ships used to come in and unload, that was all Parr's property. The entrance, where Brickyard Cove is, that was all Parr's property. Point San Pablo was all Parr's property. All the way down the coast they had property to make piers for the ships to come in to unload.

Dunning: Did the Parr family affect your lives as fishermen?

Ghio: No, no. They even helped us.

Dunning: In what way?

Ghio: Well, as a friend, if we needed a favor or something, they would help.

Dunning: Do you have any memories of Fred Parr, what he was like?

Ghio: He died. He was a friendly man. He had some property in Point Richmond and we would lease some property off of him to put up a shrimp camp. He was a friendly man. He said, "Well, being that you need some land, I'll give you this little portion here and you can go ahead and put up a shrimp camp."

Dunning: Didn't they actually also own the land that the whaling station was on, too?

Ghio: No. They owned the hill and the city of Richmond had a boundary line that goes west to east. That's on the outskirts of Parr's property and that was the city line for the city property. People have bought property out in the bay and they didn't know what to do with it so then came the scavengers and they bought the property and they started making garbage dumps there. It's all out in the bay.

Now that hurts our fishing because what they dump, it spreads out and it makes the water shallow, and the fish do not come back in. It just pushed the land out.

Ghio: The pressure of the weight of garbage would squeeze out all the land out and no more water wouldn't go up in there and purify it at all. It will be just marshland and rotten garbage.

Dunning: What area are you talking about specifically? Is it the landfill you can see it from Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor?

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: Is the fill from Richmond Sanitary in that area?

Ghio: Yes, that's the fill. Now our overflow of rainwater that came down from the hills used to go right out. They called it Herman's Slough. There used to be duck hunters and there was a lot of old time people. They had little sheds, and they used to live there. That was the overflow for the rainwater to go out. Then came another rainwater outlet some other place that the water used to go all into one and then enter out in the bay.

Then North Richmond, it was Italian people and Mexican, and it was all farming industry until Standard Oil went in and bought them out. All the Italian people had to get out. Then they started making the garbage disposal place there.

All this disposal took place in the bay starting from Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco. When they get through purifying the water that goes in the disposal place, that water is released out in the bay. Once upon a time it used to be released close to the

Ghio: land, say a mile. Now, it goes way out about two miles or three miles out in the center of the bay. When they get through purifying the water it all flushes out into the bay. Now that's going to hurt the fishing, too. You have to see what kind of water they are going to let out.

Outside of Standard Oil wharf they have one big sewer disposal. You go to Marin County, they got one way out about three miles. They put the sewage disposal there. You have one up San Pablo. They put the sewage disposal up the Delta. They're doing the same thing. Wherever they have the sewage disposal they can't release the water close to the beach. They have to run it out say a mile or two. San Francisco they go way out in the ocean and the bay.

South San Francisco they're doing the same thing. The population of people there are thick, heavy, they have the sewer disposal and they have to release this water. In time to come if the water doesn't affect the fish it's all right, but if it does it's just going to be spoilage.

Trend Toward Sport Fishing

Dunning: Do you have any predictions on the fate of fishermen?

Ghio: Well, the fishermen, we're all quitting and now it's just for sportsmen. Now the bay has turned out to be ninety-five percent sportsmen.

Dunning: Sport fishing?

Ghio: Yes, sport fishing. It's no more commercial like our times in the 1920s. It just came in to be all sports. The only ones that are doing commercial fishing in the bay are just the shrimpers. All the other industry, what we did twenty-five, thirty years ago, has been closed. There's no more fishermen to do it. There's no more buyers that want to buy that kind of fish. There's no people that want to eat that kind of fish. So everyone just pulls out, out, out, and there's nobody else.

The Public's Changing Taste in Fish

Dunning: Do you feel like you're among the last fishermen of an era, and that you're saying goodbye to an era in fishing?

Ghio: Yes. We have gear in the garage that our fathers left us and gear that we destroyed that we cannot use any more. We just burn it or throw it in the garbage. Now, that's the fishing gear that we had in the 1920s, 1925 up to 1935. We used to catch all the fishes in the bay and bring them in. Your fish markets do not want it any more. The population of the people do not want to eat this kind of fish.

Dunning: What kind of fish are you referring to?

Ghio: I mean anchovies and sardines, bass, flounders, and all that was caught in the bay, but the people don't want it. They want fish that don't smell the house when they cook it.

Dunning: It doesn't smell like fish?

Ghio: Yes. They don't want it. They want salmon, halibut, filet of sole, and that's it. All the other good fish, they don't want to handle it.

Dunning: I can agree about the anchovies.

Ghio: You see. It's all stopped now. Me and my brother, we used to go to San Francisco and we used to buy our fish. Like now we cannot buy it because they're not bringing none in. They are not catching very much fish out in the ocean. What the have is sole, salmon, halibut, and that's all. Crabs and seafood. It's all delicacy, in other words, food.

But we like different kinds of fish that we like to eat. We can't buy it. Our stores here do not handle what we want. We like to see squid. They don't handle it. We like to see rock cod fish in the whole. They don't handle it. We like to see white bait. It's a small fry fish. We don't see it on the market. We don't see that fish any more because there's no fishermen going out to catch them because there's no value to it, no demand for it.

We used to catch tom cod in the bay this time of the year. It was a rare fish. It was very delicious. The last five or six years there were none, not even a dozen or one tom cod. They've just disappeared, just stood out in the ocean and they stayed out there. The tom cod never did come back in the bay. I have the

Ghio: books to show you the picture of the tom cod. It's a delicious fish. You can fry it or boil it as a rare delicacy. But no more. It's all gone now.

Supplying Shrimp for the Bait Shops

Dunning: Yes. You mentioned that you usually eat fish four times a week. What kind of fish would you eat?

Ghio: What we fish for now is shrimp. All the other industrial fishing in the bay is gone. Nobody is fishing for it. And we have gear to catch it. But the sportsmen took over. They want the bay for themselves for bass and sturgeon and salmon.

Dunning: This is a very big season for sturgeon, I've heard.

Ghio: Yes. Now the sturgeon that were up the Sacramento River came down. Two weeks ago there was a big run of sturgeon and everybody caught them and ate them. Now they've disappeared. They don't know where they went. Now the party boats are getting ready. There's bass in the bay but they're small. You have to wait until they grow big.

Dunning: So when you go out towards the end of April you'll be shrimping?

Ghio: We'll be shrimping to get bait for the sportsmen. The bait shops sell the bait to the sportsmen to go fishing.

Dunning: Will you eat that shrimp, too?

Ghio: Yes. It was eating food on the market in the 1920s, all the way up to 1942. We each would catch them by the tons. The Chinese people would buy them, or they catch them too, and then cook them and pick them and make shrimp cocktail. It was a delicacy. They do that day in and day out. They work forty-eight hours around the clock, the Chinese people. Their wages were low. And they got by.

Brother: They made fifteen cents an hour in those days, with a baby on their back.

Ghio: Know what we were getting? We were getting a cent and a half a pound. In order to make fifteen dollars or twenty dollars for the day you had to bring in fifteen hundred pounds or two thousand pounds. Whatever you could catch and bring in, that was your wages for the day. If you brought say a thousand pounds, that was your ten dollars for the day.

But everything was cheap. Your netting was cheap, your food was cheap, and there wasn't no competition or anything. Today, the same shrimp that we catch is up to three dollars a pound for us to go catch them and then they retail them for seven dollars a pound for bait use. And there aren't enough to go around the Bay Area for the different bait shops. That's when I say the shrimp disappeared.

The shrimp vanished and didn't come back. Now there's fishermen, but they're tied up. They can't go out. They have to wait until next week when the tide settles down. Then they'll go out and see if they can catch forty, fifty pounds per day to sell.

Alaskan Fishing

Dunning: I read that eighty percent of the fish in the Bay Area now is imported from Alaska and New England and other parts of the world.

Ghio: Yes.

Dunning: So the fish is coming in from other areas?

Ghio: Yes. Now the fish is coming in from like Alaska. One thousand fishermen would go up to Alaska in one camp to go out and catch the fish and bring it in. The canneries will can it and do what they have to do. Now Japan was bumping us in our American waters up in Alaska. They used to go out and set a net and trap all our fish and keep them alive until the season was open. When the season was finished, and after they got through packing, Japan would sell to the European countries.

So the Americans saw it. We don't like that. They [Japanesel] don't belong there. So they kicked them out to two miles out. Now it's been going for about twenty-five years. The fishermen today, they go to Alaska and they catch their fish and they get double the price on the fish by going out and catching them and bringing them in. They have twenty-one days of the year to work.

Dunning: That's it?

Ghio: That's it. And England is buying a lot of fish from Alaska. Japan is buying a lot of fish that the

Ghio: American fishermen go out and catch. Then the European countries buy. After the American canneries pack them, they sell them.

Lingcod

Ghio: Lingcod was a good fish to eat all the way around. Today, they're not catching lingcod. They're catching them back in New York and all through there, Boston, but they do it all together different. They salt it down and they dry it.

Years ago, there used to be codfish boats going up to Alaska and coming to Sausalito with the salted codfish. They had a cannery there. People were working there and then they cleaned this fish all up, put it in one pound packages and sold it to the people. But no more now. The cannery caught on fire and we saw it when it was destroyed. It went up in the air. Fire.

But in Alaska they had two or three sailboats, big boats, with twenty-five fishermen per boat. Each one had their own little boat, and would go out and catch the cod, bring it in to the mother boat, and they used to clean it, salt it down, and then before the first storm comes they would put up sail and head for home and stay home all winter. Then in the spring they'll go back sailing all the way up to Alaska and the fishermen will stay up there the whole year, fish, and then come back.

Ghio: It was a pretty sight to see the sailboats when they came in the bay with their catch for the year. And they got one boat still in San Francisco that you can walk on and see it. You can smell the salt and the way the fishermen lived on the sailboats. It's still alive and it's free for the public. You should go and see it.

Dunning: It's down at Hyde Street?

Ghio: Yes. Did you go on the ferry boat there?

Dunning: Yes.

Ghio: That went from Sausalito to San Francisco, or San Francisco to Oakland and Alameda, and back and forth.

Introduction of Marine Species to the West Coast

Dunning: I just have a couple of more questions to ask you. I've heard that a lot of marine species like the softshell clams and shad and catfish and striped bass were introduced to this area from the Atlantic Coast during the nineteenth century. Did that happen in the twentieth century, too?

Ghio: No. The bass was brought in here and it was transplanted. Then they accumulated and multiplied pretty fast. Shad was here already. That was a sweet water fish. What was good about that was their eggs, the roe. It was delicious. The main part of the value of the fish was the eggs of the shad. Now that season

Ghio: used to open up in January, February, March, and April. You had three months out of the year to fish for them and just to get the eggs out of them.

Then the rest of the fish you couldn't do anything with them. We used to sell them to the crabmen, who used them for bait use. For nothing. Seventy-five cents would get them a hundred pounds. They use it for bait. But the roe of the shad was a delicacy. It was really delicious. And that's why the shad was here.

Carp is a scavenger fish that is of no value at all. Certain people, the Jewish people and colored people used to eat them. It was like a scavenger fish, we called it.

Bass, Salmon, and Shad: Main Resources

Ghio: But your bass and salmon and shad was the main resource of fishing in the bay for all the fishermen. There were five hundred fishermen up the Delta fishing for salmon, shad, and bass. In San Francisco there was another three, four hundred. We're all fishing for shad season and bass season when they came. Spring was shad season. In another month or two then they close it and the season is closed for the rest of the year.

The bass, we had it open three months out of the year to sell the bass, and then fishing for bass commercially was closed seven, eight months out of the year. Today, it's open all year round for sportsmen, sports use.

##

Ghio: In the bay in the 1920s there were clams, mussels, and cockles. Those were a different kind of clam. They were in the bay for eating purposes. Then as the years passed, they vanished and nobody wanted to take a chance of eating them. But we ate mussels, we ate clams, we ate cockles. We ate anything that grew in the water. Up and down the coast. That goes for abalones, sea urchins, and everything that grew on the rocks that was edible. It was a delicacy for us to go out in the ocean on the rocks at low tide and get this seafood and bring it home and eat it.

Snails, that we used to eat off the rocks in the bay. [laughs] This is all true. And it was a delicacy for us to eat. Now sea urchin is food that never was on the market, but the Italian people used to pick them up and crack them and get the eggs out of the sea urchin and eat them. That was a quick breakfast in the morning. You eat that in the morning about seven, eight o'clock. You eat the sea urchin [eggs] and you have a good breakfast with it. And that was a delicacy.

Now today I notice the people are catching sea urchins and feeding the other animals with it instead of eating it. It's just a cluster of eggs that grows off the rocks that the sea urchin lives on, and they're about as big as our finger. They stick on the shell of the sea urchin. When you crack it open you scoop that up, you wash it with salt water, pinch some lemon, and put it on your bread and eat it. And you go to town.

Advice for Today's Fishermen

Dunning: Would you have any advice for fishermen of today?

Ghio: My advice for fishermen is to not go in the racket, unless he's got the money to support himself, because it's too expensive to go in the fishing game. In other words, in our times we used to go in the fishing game, racket, to go fishing for anything. At a price of \$2,000 you were in business. Now today you can't go in business at all unless you've got the money to pay.

Dunning: Because you need different equipment?

Ghio: No. Your boats are high. Expenses are high. Then you have to have experience to make sure you catch enough fish to make wages, to see your wages come in. In other words, we were born and raised in the water. Our father taught us, and taught us how to fish and how to save our money and how to spend our money to make a living.

Today they go to the bank. They borrow \$25,000, \$30,000. "I don't know nothing about boats. I don't know nothing about fishing. Still I'm going to spend my money and see if I can make a living." Which is wrong. You have to have the experience of being out in the water to see how it's done and see if you like it. Then you go ahead and make your investment. It takes a lot of money today to make any kind of investment out in the ocean or in the bay.

Dunning: Have you taught your skills to any of the younger generations in your family?

Ghio: No, because they got smart. They went to school. They got a good education and we told them, "Stick to the trade you like. Whether you want to be a doctor or a lawyer or a mechanic or a plumber, stick to it and you will see your monthly wages. You'll see your weekly wages with no effort at all. But if you follow me you're not going to make it because there's too many hours you have to put in fishing and there's no money in it. There's money in it in the long run, but you work three hundred and sixty five days of the year.

The other way, they come out of college, they come out of high school, they get into a position. What they like they learn, and they're more reasonable that way. Forget about the bay because you have to be born and raised in it to see wages.

Dunning: Looking back on your career as a fisherman, would you have done anything differently?

Ghio: We were able to do anything as a laborer. I worked on shore as a laborer and I made good money because I was strong enough to do what they told me to do and I worked. I worked for different people to learn different things whether I liked it or not. If I liked it I stuck to it. If I didn't I would just quit and say, "I don't want no part of it," and get out of it.

When things were poorer we had to go to work and do labor work to survive, to make rent money and food to live. Now today, the kids, they come out of school and they're waiting for their job to appear until they're twenty-five or thirty or forty years old. If they don't get the job they are not going to go to

Ghio: work. They said, "I went to school to learn that and I'm going to wait for that job to come." Instead of going out and looking for other kinds of work and proceed in life, no they wait for the job that they learned in school.

If I learned to be a dentist and there's no job, I'm not capable to go out and do other work to make money to live. They wait until that dentist job comes to them to go and work, which is wrong.

Dunning: It's very different from your life.

Ghio: Very different.

Dunning: One other question I wanted to ask you was whether there are any superstitions connected with the sea? I heard from a fisherman that I was interviewing yesterday that his boats never went out on a Friday. That was one superstition. They could never talk about horses on the boat. I've never heard that before.

Ghio: No, the superstition is when the moon comes up. Then we know that the moon, when it comes up, the fish disappear. You have to wait for seven days until the moon changes. Then you have your fishing back again.

Dunning: But that doesn't seem like a superstition. That seems more like a fact.

Ghio: Yes, it's fact of that way there.

Dunning: But did you have any connected with your own boat about certain things that you thought were lucky or unlucky.

Brother: When we catch the fish we said, "We're lucky," and we came in. That's all.

Ghio: Yes. Well, we try. It's all guesswork and if we make a good catch we were lucky to catch it and come in and show that we are fishermen to bring in our catch.

Garlic:--A Good Medicine

Dunning: But did you ever have the superstitions like the "evil eye"? Or wearing cloves of garlic to ward off infection?

Ghio: No. Garlic was our main food. And onions and potatoes and all that. It was all bought there and we cooked it and used it. When we were kids, four or five years old, we used to put on garlic. My aunt saw that we had the itch on our nose or something. There was something wrong. So my aunt, she used to get the garlic--at that time garlic was cheap--peel it, string it, and then smash it, and go to sleep with it around your neck. When you inhaled you inhaled garlic all night. The next morning the germs in the nose or any itch you had, it would go away.

Dunning: Well, it seems like the Italians were right on that line because there's certainly more and more evidence about the healing qualities of garlic.

Ghio: Yes. In other words in our time, when we had an itch we called it an allergy. We had to go to a doctor. The doctor had to find out what that allergy comes from. So the Italian people, they would figure that

Ghio: allergy out. There's something that causing him to have the itch. In our time there was cotton and wool. Now wool will give you an itch. So in order to prevent the wool to give you the itch you used to jump into cotton or linen and then you could see right away if there was any itch. If there wasn't no itch, then you had to eliminate wool and stay with cotton or linen.

Dunning: Have you and your brother been pretty healthy through your career?

Ghio: Well, we had one family doctor that took care of the family since we were born. He died at a good age and he was a military doctor in the service in the 1918 war. He took care of us. When we were sick, we would just go to him. Call him up, he'll come at the door and examine you and cheer you up. He'll cheer you up whether you had an appendix or a cold or a cough or a whooping cough. Whatever it is, he'll cheer you up. That's how friendly he was.

We never believed in operations in those days. If it was the tonsils, our doctor did not take our tonsils out. We still have our tonsils. Some others in the family, the doctor says, "Well, he's got a swollen throat. The tonsils have to come out."

When my brother was six, seven years old his tonsils were taken out at the doctor's office. That was wrong. In other words, the doctors would examine him and he said, "He's got bad tonsils. I'll take them out here."

Ghio: So they used to dope him up a little bit, take the tonsils out, and present them to you. He said, "Now you go home and eat all the ice cream you want. You'll be all right."

They didn't say that the cold or the sickness comes and you had to go to the hospital. No, the way they figure, if something happens to you they do it right there at the office.

Special Ambitions Now

Dunning: Do you and your brother and sister have any special ambitions now? Things you would like to do or places you would like to go.

Brother: Just relax.

Ghio: We like to go fishing and relax in our spare time. In other words, we're not interested in going to work hard like we did.

Dunning: So you actually enjoy it when you go out now?

Brother: Right. Yes.

Ghio: Yes. We go out and we enjoy it. We're not interested in making any money because Uncle Sam is paying us back on our social security so it doesn't pay to go out and multiply your work.

Reflecting on the Past

Dunning: Is there anything else you would like to add now, either about Richmond or the waterfront?

Ghio: Well, we don't want to go back to that time because it's too old and it won't help you out any. Like I say, after the 1906 fire our family was big and my father had to raise all the family up. Then, when the earthquake came there was no place to sleep or eat and people had to go around and pick up junk, boards, and make sheds, box houses, just to get by until the place was cleaned up.

We had one brother, he stepped on a nail. Doctors in those days didn't know what he had. He had an infection of the foot. He passed on fast because there was no cure. In those days the doctors had to make medicine. We had to drink it. We drank so much medicine that if we had to pay for it we wouldn't be here. It was all made by the pharmacy and there was no such things as pills. The only thing you had was a powder form of an aspirin, and you had to drink it with water. That was your pill, your aspirin. Then the rest was all sulfa drugs.

When we were kids, eight o'clock and we were in bed. We got up early in the morning. Five, six o'clock we're all up and we're jolly. Have our breakfast and away we go. Eight o'clock at night we're all home in bed, not like the kids now they put on television. "I'm not going to go to sleep. I want to watch television." Until ten, eleven o'clock. No, our times--

Brother: There was no television.

Dunning: Well, that probably was much better.

Ghio: We never did. We were on one city block. We were about twenty-five, thirty kids. When it came eight o'clock the mothers used to call us. We all scattered and headed for home and that was it until the next morning. Then we would play all day out in the street. Not sidewalk, the street. Sidewalk was for the people to walk on. We played out in the street. Just played back and forth, went to school, played.

Richmond Whaling Station

Dunning: I remember when the tape was off last week you started telling me why you didn't work at the whaling station. Could you briefly tell me about that again?

Ghio: We knew the boss and he offered a job to work at the whaling station.

Dunning: Was that Mr. Caito?

Ghio: Yes. We knew him very good and he only lived a half a block away from us. We knew his father and his grandfather. When he opened up the whaling station he had a Norwegian fellow from up north up at Portland, Oregon, where they were killing the whales. Then they closed them up there so they came to Richmond to show how they operate and kill the whales and process them.

Ghio: We were watching them and he said, "You guys are offered a job if you want it."

We said, "First we want to see the operation." So we watched them for a week or a month.

Dunning: Did you ever go out on a whaling vessel?

Ghio: No. But then we watched them, how they operate. They had knives that were--I won't exaggerate, but two feet long, sharp as a razor, with a long handle, say four feet, five feet. When they had to cut the whale up, the blubber they were cutting was from six to eight inches thick. They had to take all that blubber out and push it on the side and melt it and get the oil out of it.

Then they had to go in there and and cut the meat. On a whale they had as many as ten, fifteen, twenty fellows working with these knives. If these knives touch you, you were cut. And there was blood and it was slippery. You had to wear shoes with spikes so you won't slip on account of the oil.

When we saw that we said, "We don't want no part of it. You keep it. We don't want it."

So these northern fellows said, "This is the way we have to cut the whale. These are the knives we use." The first year it was hard for him to learn. Then he hired one or two whale boats that were harpooning the whales. In order for them to harpoon whales, to shoot the whales, they had to get a government permit because the torpedo or the part of

Ghio: the fuse had to come through the government. The government would allow so many fuses for them to handle on the boat and to go shoot whales. The whaling boat was a two, three-man job.

Dunning: I though it was about four or five.

Ghio: Well, they say four or five, but they could get by with three. Once you hit the harpoon into the whale everything goes out free, the line and the buoy and the marker. That whale is swimming until he slows down. When he slows down the boat is keeping up with him. Then when he sees the whale is slowing down, they shoot another harpoon with a fuse that will crack their backbone. When they crack their backbone, then the whale is dead.

Then they get on the whale, they bring it by the boat, and they poke a hose in the stomach and fill it up with air so he floats. Then they put a marker there. Then they keep hunting for whales. They don't go say five miles away from that one whale until they catch another one or two or three. Then they put them all together and they bring them right in. They tow them right into the dock and then they work forty-eight hours around the clock.

Dunning: Are you glad you made that decision?

Ghio: Yes. The money was good there, but like I said we don't like the work. When Mr. Caito was short of help they had a big fish company in San Francisco and there was about six or seven butchers down there fileting fish--you know, cutting fish up. He used to get those

Ghio: men to come up here and work in the whale station. They used to pay them double the money that they were making down in the fish market. They liked that because that was surplus money and the boss used to pay them cash so he could get them up there to help him to get those whales cleaned up. It used to take about twelve hours to destroy one whale.

Dunning: Are you glad you didn't go with the whaling?

Ghio: No, we didn't want no part of it.

Brother: We had our own work to do.

Ghio: I had a friend who was from back east and she came and visited us. It was on a Sunday. We had dinner. I said, "Well, let's take a ride. We'll take a ride up Point San Pablo. There's a whaling place. Maybe we might see some action."

So we took a ride up there and when we got there they were just pulling up a whale. It was on a Sunday afternoon about one o'clock. You think she was scared? She went and she walked all around the whale and there was the strong smell and odor. I said, "You can't get close to it. It's too strong, the smell."

She said, "This is my first time to see a whale." So she went right up there.

The boss knew and he said, "Go ahead, walk around the place until the men get ready, they put on their gowns and start working." She walked all around. She

Ghio: saw the whale and everything. If she's living today, she'll still remember what she's seen.

Closing Remarks

Dunning: Do you have anything else you would like to add before this tape runs out?

Ghio: Are you interested on wines?

Dunning: Well, I am. However, in this particular project I really don't have the budget, to find out about it.

Ghio: Anyway, back in the old country they were making wine and delivering wine from one point to the other in big kegs or barrels of five hundred to a thousand gallons on a barge and go from port to port. After a while, when my father came here he put up his own winery.

Dunning: Well, if by any chance, I'm able to do more on this project, like get additional funding, I would be interested in this.

Ghio: No, but the wine, we were born and raised on it. The wine went on the table, in a big pitcher. The pitcher was on the table, and if you wanted a glass of water with your meal, you had to go up to the faucet to get it. The wine was on the table. Everybody had to have a glass of wine with his meal. That was a must. Morning, noon, or night.

Dunning: It is after lunchtime. Does anyone else have anything to add?

Sister: Not me. I don't know.

Dunning: I must say that this is the first time I've ever done an interview where other people have sat in and it's been okay. Usually if there's more than one person in the room it gets really crazy because people keep interrupting.

Ghio: No, if you tell us to keep quiet we'll keep quiet.

Dunning: Usually people get so excited that they can't stop talking.

Ghio: But you've got enough information?

Dunning: I would say I've got about as much as I can handle. Some day, when you know you're going down to the harbor could you give me a call the night before. I'd like to come down and take some pictures. Or when you go out on a run at the end of April I would like to go.

Ghio: You're going to be busy from now on right along?

Dunning: I'll be pretty busy, but I have a flexible schedule that if I knew about it--

Ghio: Then you'll make an appointment to take a ride?

Dunning: Yes, if you feel okay about having a passenger who's a good swimmer.

Ghio: It's simple. Sometimes we say, "Well, let's go out and take a ride up to China Camp."

Sister: They might give you a ride on their boat.

Ghio: No, we go out, it's a nice day. Sometime if I call you up, if you can make it we'll say be at the harbor at--

Dunning: Three-thirty? [nervous laugh]

Ghio: No, the most is seven o'clock.

Dunning: I'm usually at the pool at seven, so I'll just do a switch.

Ghio: The most is seven o'clock, and we go across the bay there, across the channel. We do our little fishing for about two or three hours. You'll see how we operate and then you'll see the different kinds of fish we catch. Then we come back in the harbor and then you jump in your car and you go home.

Dunning: Yes, I would like to do that. It would really give me a sense of your work.

Ghio: The only thing we tell people, "Watch out you don't go overboard." See, our boats, they rock. And they rock so fast that you have to have sea legs to stand still.

But don't have fear because there's no danger of turning it over or anything. Just don't have fear. If we don't have fear, you shouldn't have fear. Just like you say going on an airplane. Well, we have fear going on an airplane. We haven't been on an airplane and we don't want no part of an airplane.

Dunning: See, I have no fear on an airplane.

Ghio: Because you have the experience of going on there, but to us there's fear. We just stay with the locomotive trains and the buses and we're fine. Boats, we don't care--we know if a ship or boat has trouble we're there to help because we know all about what could happen.

Dunning: Well, thank you very much. This has been a real delight to meet all of you.

##

Transcriber and final typist: David Pollock

.

APPENDICES

Fishermen By Trade...on San Francisco Bay

with the Ghio Brothers



Richmond Museum

february 28 - june 26, 1988

Frisco's Bay Shrimpers

National Fisherman Yearbook
Summer 1981

Ghio Brothers Could Write A Book On The Fishery

By Willard Chase

RICHMOND, CALIF. — Tony and Dominic Ghio, and their Monterey Clipper *Natale*, are among the last of an endangered species, the San Francisco Bay shrimp fisherman.

Since he was nine years old, Tony has been a commercial fisherman — 61 years working the waters inside the Golden Gate.

And for most of his three-score years afloat, Tony has been catching shrimp, once a plentiful delicacy served in San Francisco's best restaurants and exported in large quantity to the Orient.

Today, Tony and his kid-brother, Dominic, 65, continue to earn a comfortable living netting shrimp for use as live bait by sport fishermen, chiefly those seeking striped bass and sturgeon.

No one seems certain what factors virtually wiped out bay shrimp just after World War II, according to the Ghio brothers.

"But they got so scarce for a time that only Tony continued making a living from them," says Dominic.

Like many Bay Area fishermen, Tony and Dominic were members of a large Italian family.

"Our father, Angelo Ghio, came to San Francisco with our mother and two kids from Genoa in the 1890s," says Tony. "He was nicknamed '*Natale*' because he was born on Christmas Eve. I named my boat for my father.

"There were five brothers and three sisters in our family when we were growing up in San Francisco's North Beach," he adds.

"Our oldest brother and our father were out on the bay fishing when the earthquake hit San Francisco in 1906," says Dominic. "They were fishing in an old lateen-rigged sailing boat and it took them almost three hours to get back to North Beach.

"When they got to the dock, my father was told that his brothers had gathered all the family and taken them on their boats to safety in Sausalito. A cousin born a week before the quake was flung on a mattress on the beach at Sausalito and she's still alive today."

"We boys being raised in San Francisco went out fishing with our father quite early," says Tony. "We'd go out after school, fish some, sleep a little, fish some more, and come ashore in the morning to

go to school. I never made it through high school because I was fishing.

"We learned to fish on my father's boat (which eventually was equipped with a 6- or 8-h.p. gasoline engine). When he thought we had learned enough, he'd take us down to the Genoa boat shop and get the Beviaquas, father and son, to build us a boat. They were called Monterey clippers but most of them were built in San Francisco Bay."

The building that housed the Genoa Boat Works at Fisherman's Wharf remains there today and is now used as a warehouse.

Tony was 28 when he'd learned enough and earned enough to order the *Natale* to be built at the Genoa Boat Works in 1938. The 30' *Natale*, complete with ironwood keel, oak ribs and cedar planking, with a single-cylinder Hicks engine under a tiny cabin, cost Tony a total of \$2,200.

"It took the Beviaquas about three weeks to build a Monterey boat," recalls Tony. "They were all built by eye. They didn't use plans."

"We've kept it up whenever it needed some work and the boat's as good today as when it was built," boasts Dominic.

The brothers did, however, remove the old Hicks gasoline engine several years ago and replaced it with a small diesel. They could no longer find repair parts for the old one-lunger that originally provided the Monterey's with their distinctive engine sound, the slow-beat "potato-potato-potato" that was once so familiar echoing across San Francisco Bay.

The eldest of the Ghio boys, the late Pete Ghio, was one of the first of European stock to enter the bay's commercial shrimp fishery.

Although Italian fishermen had harvested bay shrimp with hand nets near Hunters Point (at the south edge of San Francisco) about the time of the Civil War, the fishery was not very active until about 1870, when the Chinese entered the picture. Italians sold shrimp on the local market, where the sweet little shrimp soon earned a reputation as a particularly tasty regional delicacy.

Chinese fishermen cooked and sun-dried most of their catch and shipped it to the Orient.

The shrimp fishery was almost exclusively Chinese until sometime after World War I when Pete Ghio began shrimping upstream from Angel Island, establishing a

shrimp camp at the east bay city of Richmond, the Bay Area terminal of the Atchafson, Topeka and the Santa Fe Railroad.

At that time, there were numerous shrimp camps operated by Chinese fishermen, many of them using traditional junks they built in the Bay area. Most camps were located in the southern part of San Francisco Bay, but there were also camps in Marin County above the town of San Rafael on San Pablo Bay and directly opposite on the east shore at Richmond, behind the Standard Oil refinery.

The Ghio brothers today operate out of Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, a haven for sport fishermen, a short distance from the old east shore fish camp.

Chinese fishermen used bag nets staked out at right angles to the tidal currents, according to the Ghio brothers. Near the turn of each tide, the bag of the net would be emptied into junks and the net turned inside out to trap shrimp moving in the opposite direction.

"We used a similar net, a beam trawl, held open at the front by a 20' pole with the cod end extending back maybe 40', towed along the bottom behind our slowly moving boat," Dominic explained. "That's what we used then and we still use it today." Weights along the bottom front wings of the net stir up the mud in which the shrimp flourish.

Pete Ghio's shrimp camp was located in the Richmond inner harbor area. Three of his younger brothers — Angelo, Tony and Dominic — joined him in the business over the years.

With the arrival of World War II, nearly all the shrimp camps were displaced by wartime shipbuilding operations. Only China Camp near San Rafael is still in existence and that is being restored as a historic park project.

Eighty-year-old Frank Quan still catches shrimp out of China Camp, according to the Ghio brothers. But his catch is no longer exported to the Orient. He, too, catches only enough to serve nearby bait shops.

Although his brothers went into other fisheries during World War II as part of a nationwide food production effort, Tony continued to fish for shrimp, a favorite bait for bay fishermen.

"It was about the end of the war when shrimp just about vanished from the bay," Tony recalls. "But I could always find a

few and the bait shops always wanted them. So I stayed in business with shrimp."

Dominic, who had fished for salmon, sardines, shark and other species, as well as shrimp, spent nearly 10 years working ashore before he joined Tony on the Natale to continue shrimping.

The two veteran fishermen are now able to make "comfortable" livings with the Natale, netting an average of 50 to 80 lbs. of shrimp a day, which they deliver "live" to bait shops not far from their Richmond home.

In recent years, a number of other fishermen in other parts of the bay have entered the shrimp bait fishery with apparent success.

But ask anywhere around the bay about shrimp and you'll be told: "Go see the Ghio boys at Point San Pablo. Tony's been catching shrimp for half a century . . . even when there were none."

The Old Men and The Sea

Oakland Tribune
April 17, 1988

2 men whose workplace was the bay

By Lynda Seaver
The Tribune

On San Francisco Bay, the most endangered species are the Ghio brothers, Dominic and Tony.

Along with their late father, Angelo Natale Ghio, they have almost 100 years in the commercial fishing business, starting in the 1890s when Natale — as he liked to be called — left Genoa, Italy, to settle in San Francisco.

Today Dominic, 70, and Tony, 77, live in Richmond with their sister Louise. Though they closed the family business in 1986, the brothers still go out three or four times a week on the 30-foot Natale, named for their father, to catch shrimp, perch, shark or whatever they might find.

"Today we fish for relaxation," Tony emphasized. "We give our catches to friends."

"But they only take them if we clean them," Dominic interjected. "Nobody likes to work with the fish."

The Ghios are so in tune with marine life, they say they can walk into any market or restaurant, take a look at or taste the catch, then rattle off where and when the fish were caught. They even know when someone tries to pull a fast one — such as passing off rex sole, a cheaper fish, for the more expensive sand dabs.

They rarely pass up the chance to tell their fish stories, often reminiscing for hours on end. While one talks, the other often runs off to grab a visual aid — a piece of net used 30 years ago, a pail with holes, a charred cookpot. The Ghios aren't the type to throw anything away.

The days of boats powered by lateen sails, waters dominated by Northern Italian accents and the "potato-potato-potato" sound of one-cylinder engines are only memories for Dominic and Tony. The labor was often back-breaking, yet it is the simplicity of the era they still crave.

"Today's fishermen are in it for the big money, the big catches," Dominic said. "Back then (in the '20s and '30s) all the fishermen cared about was making the day's wages. After that it was time to relax and let the fish multiply."

The Ghios have never modernized, preferring to weave nets by hand or navigate by gasoline lantern and the knowledge that comes from their 60-some-odd years on the water. As always, they follow the migratory paths of the fish by instinct rather than radar, hauling in their catch with brawn rather than the mechanized hitches and wenchers of modern-day trawlers.

"In our day, boats were made of wood and the men were made of iron," said Dominic. "Now the boats are made of iron and the men paper."

Dominic and Tony are thicker in paunch than younger days, yet their arms and shoulders still

bulge with muscle. Their faces are blanketed by stubble and as weathered as the planks of the Natale. Their hands are chapped and raw, the result of weaving nets two to three hours a day.

They were taught their craft at the age of 4 or 5 by their father, who rationalized that if they could not learn to weave by age 10, they couldn't be fishermen.

"But we are still weaving, so we must still be learning," Tony mused. While both agree it would be easier on hands and eyes to buy their nets, Dominic says by weaving "we get the quality we want."

Dominic and Tony apprenticed alongside older brothers Natale (Nate), Pete and Angelo. Their mother, Dominica, died in 1918 of influenza, when Dominic was 3 months old.

The elder Natale sent his daughters Lena and Louise off to a convent school while he settled his boys in North Beach, not far from the canneries and fish-packing plants. The canneries are long gone but their old Bay Street home still stands.

"Today the waterfront is only for jogging," said Dominic, who settled in Richmond with his brother in the '50s. "The past is gone."

Of the Ghio boys only Nate chose to work onshore. In the early morning Natale took his sons out to fish, then returned the boys in time for school. By afternoon they would be back on the water.

"The days were for fishing and the nights were for making wine," Dominic said. "We made it right out of the basement, and there was a pitcher on the table

morning, noon and night. If you wanted water, you had to go to a faucet."

Their father was headstrong, never allowing his boys to fear the rough coastal waters, bad weather or the whales that would sound 15 to 20 feet from their boat "just to say hello," Tony said.

"If you had fear," Dominic recalled, "our father said, 'The best thing for you to do is get off the boat.'"

In the early years the family concentrated on shrimping, a trade dominated by Italian and Chinese immigrants. In four hours time the family would haul in 1,500 to 2,000 pounds of the tiny crustaceans, spending the rest of their day separating and processing their catch. In the heyday of the '30s they received 1½ cents a pound from restaurants and markets. Today shrimp caught in the bay go for \$2 to \$3 a pound and are used primarily as bait.

In 1938 Tony bought his own boat, the 30-foot Monterey clipper Natale, for \$2,200. Tony and Dominic worked alongside their brother Pete, who had a ship of his own, as well as his own shrimp camp, off the coast of Richmond.

"Within one hour you could catch 500 pounds of shrimp," Dominic said. "That's how thick and multiplied they were."

"It was a healthy life. The bay was open for people to fish, anchor, sleep. In our times everything was so free."

During those years the Ghios spent much of their life fishing off Point San Pablo or outside the Golden Gate near the Farallones, coming into port only to "sleep, shower and shave."

Onboard the Natale they kept charcoal stoves, cookpots, utensils and all manner of food, though they often looked to their catches. Tony talks of eating snails, clams and sea urchins on bread with a pinch of lemon juice. Occasionally they feasted on whale or porpoise salami, purchased from the old whale processing plant in Richmond.

"It looks just like regular salami, though it's tastes a little wild," Dominic said.

But by the '40s the fishing business had changed. The earlier construction of Treasure Island and the Golden Gate and Richmond-San Rafael bridges

slowed down the currents, thus reducing the number of fish. Some fishermen headed off to war, while shrimp camps and canneries gave way to Navy shipyards.

The Ghios, with the exception of Tony, began fishing for the Army as part of a nationwide food program.

By the end of the war the shrimp population had all but died out. The Ghios continued their humble existence as shrimpers, but turned to more profitable species — sardines, perch, sole or salmon. Some were sold to Chinatown markets, others to Spenger's restaurant in Berkeley.

Natale and Pete eventually passed away, leaving Dominic and Tony to carry on. During lean times the two would work odd jobs on shore, mending and making nets, building and repairing boats or packing fish.

The two brothers never married, rationalizing they had little time for such commitments. "The family trade was all we needed," said Dominic.

The two tried to pass on their craft to nephews, "but they don't like to fish, and that's OK," he added.

"To make it in the business you must grow up on the water. If you cannot learn its currents, where the fish live, you cannot make your wages. You cannot survive."



400 NEVIN AVENUE

March 15, 1988

Contact Person:
Kathleen Rupley
235-7387

For Immediate Release

Photo Requested

"Fishermen By Trade, on San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers" is an exhibition based on the oral history of Dominic Ghio. It is on display at the Richmond Museum and runs through June 26.

Dominic Ghio and his brother Tony, the last generation in the family to become fishermen, made their livelihood by fishing the waters of the San Francisco Bay. The family fishing business in the United States, spanning 95 years, began when their father, in 1890, like many Italian immigrants, arrived in San Francisco to begin a new life. After Dominic and his three brothers apprenticed with their father, learning the essential skills of the trade including net weaving and boat building, the young Ghio brothers entered their father's business.

"In our day", remembers Dominic Ghio, "boats were made of wood and the men, iron. Nowaday, boats are made of iron, the men are out of

paper." Through Dominic's oral history viewers get a sense of the changes in the Bay and its dwindling resources from the perspective of the hard working fishermen. Statistics show a startling decline of fish caught along California's shores. In 1936, 1.76 billion pounds of fish were caught compared to a 1984 figure of 460 million pounds.

Much of the Ghio family's fishing gear has been saved. In the exhibit these tools help to visually interpret the stark and simple life of unsure wages, hazards and hard work that became the brothers' way of life.

Today, at ages 77 and 69, Tony and Dominic are perhaps the last fishermen in the Bay Area who still weave nets by hand. On the second and last Sunday of the month the Ghios will be at the Museum to demonstrate this traditional skill to the public. Other events related to the exhibit have also been scheduled including a once a month showing of "A Day On the Bay", a story of the immigrant Italian fishermen in Santa Cruz in the late 1880's including relatives of the Ghio's who along with several other families established that community.

The Richmond Museum is open Thursday through Sunday 1-4:00 p.m. for this exhibit. We are closed on holidays. Located at 400 Nevin Ave., Richmond. Admission is free and special docent tours of the exhibit are available by appointment. Call 235-7387 for further information.

Preserving Richmond's History - A Collective Effort

Fishermen By Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers offers a glimpse into one family's lifetime occupation of fishing in the waters of Northern California. The exhibit evolved from a tape-recorded oral history of Dominic Ghio, a participant in a larger project, "On the Water Front: An Oral History of Richmond, California", conducted in affiliation with the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. In this project more than twenty local residents were interviewed with a focus on early families, World War II Kaiser Shipyard workers, cannery workers, fishermen and whalers.

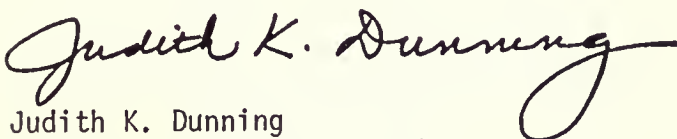
It was clear from the first interview session with Dominic Ghio that an important part of the story was not being captured on tape and was in danger of being permanently lost. Their home was a mini-fishing museum with crab nets from the 1920's, charco-stoves and acres of herring and shrimp nets filling their back porch, attic and garage. When I met the Ghio family in 1986, they had already begun to destroy some of the old fishing gear.

Not having the capacity in the oral history project to collect such items, I alerted Kathleen Rupley at the Richmond Museum who became interested in presenting a local exhibit. Thus, a collaboration of the Richmond Museum staff, the Ghio family and an oral historian began. What you see today is the result of our work together.

We advise you that the Fishermen By Trade exhibit is based on one family's version of fishing. It does not attempt to tell the whole story of the Bay fishing industry. The words are Dominic Ghio's, excerpts from his oral history interviews.

It's been an adventure getting to know the Ghio family, especially those early morning shrimping trips to China Camp on the Natale, where I could see their work first-hand. I always brought a camera and my sea legs.

I would like to thank the staff at the Richmond Museum for making this exhibit possible. Also, my special thanks to the California Council for the Humanities for their original funding of the oral history project, and to local sponsors including Chevron and Mechanics Bank.



Judith K. Dunning
Regional Oral History Office
University of California at Berkeley
February 23, 1988

one of the first people of European stock to enter the bay's commercial shrimp fishing.

Until this time, shrimping had been almost exclusively Chinese. The Ghio's practice some techniques similar to the Chinese. For instance, Chinese shrimp fishermen used nets staked against the tide. Near the turn of each tide, the net would be emptied into the junk and turned inside out to catch shrimp going the opposite direction.

"We use a similar net...towed along the bottom behind our slowly moving boat," Dominic explains, "That's what we used then and still use today."

Therefore, the Ghio's craft is very alive, yet generations old. Their skill and practice is itself part of the history of Richmond's bay. This history is captured in the exhibition. On display are the tools of the trade; the hand-made nets, the baskets and buckets and the boats used by the Ghios and representative of a passing era. Also photographs and personal mementos which reflect the family and domestic life are viewable along with other basic visual information about the history of the Richmond water front.

The exhibit, which is a spin-off project from Judith Dunning's On the Water Front: An Oral History of Richmond, California, will open with a membershi preview reception on Saturday, February 27. Throughout the course of the exhibition, which will run through June, various films, workshops and activities will be held to teach more about the Water Front history.

Photos:(Top to Bottom) A catch of Bay Shrimp held for inspection; Crewing the Ghio's boat on the bay. An example of



... not just another fish story.

The new Seaver Room exhibit opening February 28) explores the world of a local endangered species: the bay shrimp fishermen. Two fishermen imparticular, Dominic and Tony Ghio, are the central focus of the show, as their lives on the Bay chronicle the heritage and history of local commercial fishing. The Ghio's are such a part of Richmond's area bays, that when you ask around about shrimp fishing, you'll be told, "Go see the Ghio boys at Pt. San Pablo." They've been catching shrimp

were none."

Indeed, the Ghio's trade goes back in Richmond history. The Ghio's describe themselves as "...born and raised in the water," and quite appropriately. Their father, Angelo Ghio who came to San Francisco from Italy in the 1890's taught his four boys his craft from a very young age. "We boys being raised in San Francisco went out fishing with our father quite early," Tony recalls, "We'd go out after school, fish some, sleep a little, fish some more, and come ashore in

Judith K. Dunning

Interviewer/Editor Regional Oral History Office since 1982.
Specialty in community and labor history.
Project Director, "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of
Richmond, California."

Previous oral history projects: Three Generations of Italian
Women in Boston's North End; World War I and II shipyard workers
at the Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston; and Textile mill workers in
Lowell, Massachusetts.

Photography exhibitions: "Lowell: A Community of Workers,"
Lowell, MA 1981-1984 (travelling).
Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers"
Richmond Museum, 1988.

Play: "Boomtown" based on the oral histories of shipyard
workers, produced by San Francisco Tale Spinners Theater, 1989.

Member Richmond Arts Commission, 1988-1990.

Currently adapting Richmond community oral histories into large
print books for California adult literacy programs.

124282

1855. 4

